Farish A. Noor

America's Encounters with Southeast Asia, 1800-1900

Before the Pivot

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America's Encounters with Southeast Asia, 1800-1900

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Farish A. Noor

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To my daughter,
Puteri Isabella

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Ilmu Sosial Dipinggirkan karena Tidak Membawa Untung
FARISH A. NOOR

A note on spelling

A note on the spelling of words and names as they appear in this book.

I have retained the spelling of names as they appeared in the texts that I refer to in the following chapters, and in some cases there have been differences between the way some names were written by different authors. In the case of place-names, I have retained the original spelling as found in the texts I refer to in the first instance, but have otherwise used contemporary local spellings in subsequent references. Whatever discrepancies or inaccuracies in spelling found in the originals have been retained, and are indicated as well.

Introduction

The eagle in the Indies: America's early encounters with Southeast Asia, and how Southeast Asia was imagined in the nineteenth century

> All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them.[1]
>
> – Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

I A book about books, and why books matter

> Book! You lie there; the fact is, you books must know your places. You'll do to give us the bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the thoughts.[2]
>
> – Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

This is a book about books; and work on this book began while I was working on another book, that was also about books. What ties this work to my previous effort is my interest in how Southeast Asia was seen, imagined and depicted in the books that were written by Western authors in the nineteenth century; and how an entire region along with its peoples and cultures were discursively constructed in the writings that were produced by those who had come from the West and were encountering the world of the East Indies face-to-face for the first time.

This book will look at the writings of American authors – who came to Southeast Asia at different times and with different intentions – and how the Americans of the nineteenth century came to see Southeast Asia as a region that was distinct and different from the world they knew back home. I will attempt a close reading of their works, in order to show how the early encounters with Southeast Asia helped to frame an understanding of America's own identity (in the minds of the authors) as well as the identity of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians, that were cast as America's constitutive Other. In the course of doing so, my approach will be a combination of both

1 Vonnegut, pp. 26-27.

2 Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pp. 429-430.

literary and discourse analysis, though set against a broader backdrop of history and political economy. I would like to state at the outset that this is not a work on the history of Southeast Asia or America, for much work has already been done in both domains by scores of able scholars. Rather, the aim of this work is to look at how American writers had imagined a part of Asia through the perspective of their own national identity, and how that identity was put in bold relief as it was contrasted to the idea of Southeast Asia as a region that was foreign and alien to them. In the course of this work I wish show how that idea of Southeast Asia was added to, modified and redefined time and again, as America's own development took it along a path which led it from being a former colony to an Asia-Pacific power.

There are three points that I would like to address in the introduction of this book: The first is that America's presence in Southeast Asia dates back much longer than many people may realize. In Southeast Asia today there is the popular belief that America's presence in Southeast Asia can be dated back to America's conquest of the Philippines after the Philippine-American War of 1899 to 1902, and that America's influence was most strongly felt across the region from World War Two to the end of the Cold War in 1989. This is obviously true, and America's hold on the Philippines in particular has been well documented by a range of eminent writers, both Filipino and American. McCoy and Scarano, for example, have looked at how America's conquest of the Philippines (and the occupation of Hawaii, Guam and Puerto Rico) expanded the territory of the United States and transformed it into a Pacific power, and also expanded the scope of American governmentality into domains that had hitherto been untouched, such as colonial race relations, colonial law enforcement, colonial education and the development of a vast communicative and logistical network that held America's Pacific territories together.[3] Theirs is an impressive volume that has offered a broad, macro-level account of the building on America's Pacific empire; and how that vast domain was regulated and governed by the modern American state. But my intention is to push the clock back even further, and look at how America was already present in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and how America's first tentative attempts to gain a foothold in the region had set the stage for its eventual arrival as a colonial power in the East Indies.

The second point follows from the first, and it is this: That on both sides of the Pacific America's early encounter with Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century is an area that has received relatively less attention

3 McCoy and Scarano.

when compared to the works that have been written about America's role in Asia in the twentieth century. Weatherbee's very detailed account of American-Southeast Asia relations, for instance, focuses on relations that were developed from the 1950s.[4] In my cursory examination of the history textbooks used in the schools of Southeast Asia I have seen that students – at both primary and secondary school level – are taught about the American revolution and America's role in the Pacific during World War Two; but the image of America that is conveyed is that of a *distant* land that has had little contact with Southeast Asia until very recently.[5] When discussing the colonial era from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, school books in Southeast Asia have tended to focus on the role played by the major European colonial powers – Britain, Holland, France, Spain and Portugal – while overlooking the fact that during the nineteenth century Southeast Asia was a region hotly contested by other states as well, and that citizens of many other countries, including America, were trying to establish a presence there for both themselves and their respective countries. Andreas Zangger's work on the history of the Swiss in Singapore is one of the few works that has looked at the role of other Europeans who were active in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century,[6] while Khoo Salma Nasution's work on Germans and German-speaking Austrians and Jews in Penang is another work of importance as it traces the history of German missionaries like Johann Georg Bausum and freemasons such as Felix Henri Gottlieb.[7] Most recently Richard Hale's *The Balestiers: The First American Residents of Singapore* (2016) is among the few books that have focused on Americans in Southeast Asia in the same century.

The third point that I would like to raise is that America's rise as an Asia-Pacific power and a colonial presence in Southeast Asia was not a linear, predetermined process, but rather the result of a range of competing factors and pressures. The contingency that was at the heart of the American revolutionary project and present in its genesis, has been best captured in my opinion by Ellis in his study of the founding brothers of the revolutionary generation[8]; while it is Herring's recounting of America's complex evolution

4 See Weatherbee.

5 Noor, 'How Indonesia'.

6 Zangger has noted that by the 1820s there was already a Swiss presence in Southeast Asia, thanks to the solitary efforts of the Swiss merchant Auguste Borel, who had been sent to Cochinchina on behalf of the French government, and who later acted as a private Swiss merchant (pp. 19-24).

7 Nasution, pp. 21-30.

8 Ellis, *Founding Brothers*.

from colony to superpower that presents America's history painted upon a broad canvas, and which captures the contingency, accidents and ironies of America's eventual ascendancy as the undisputed power in the Pacific.[9] Ellis' work brings to the fore the complex questions of identity and purpose that troubled America's founding fathers so, while Herring's work highlighted the manner in which America's quest for recognition and later prominence necessarily brought it into contact with the rest of the world, and in the course of doing so shaped America's identity and destiny as well. Both these works remind us that contingency is the bedfellow of history, and that historical progression is hardly ever neat or linear. They also remind us that history is something that can be recorded at a number of levels – from the macro to the micro – and that there are in fact layers of histories that have to be peeled one by one. And that is where this work comes in.

Once again I would like to state that this is a book about books. What I intend to do in this work is to bring together some of the earliest known writings on Southeast Asia that were written by American authors in the nineteenth century. As we shall see in the following chapters, these authors were themselves men of diverse backgrounds – some of them were diplomats by appointment, others attached to the navy or the clerical orders – and they were among the first Americans to write about their experiences in Southeast Asia. They were often well aware of the fact that they were Americans abroad, and they were writing for the benefit of their fellow Americans back home. Elsewhere I have looked at how British authors – men of the East India Company in particular – had likewise produced a body of writing on Southeast Asia for the benefit of their king, their company patrons and their fellow countrymen, and in the course of doing so also defined themselves and justified their presence in Southeast Asia, creating a self-referential narrative that spoke as much about themselves as it did about the place they were writing about.[10] In this work I wish to show how America's early encounter with Southeast Asia not only produced some of the first American works on the region, but also helped to create a discursive community of like-minded American scholars, diplomats and adventurers who saw America as a nascent nation that was Western, and yet distinct and different from the rest of Europe – at least at the beginning.

What I aim to demonstrate is that the early American travellers to Southeast Asia did see themselves as a people who were different from other Westerners, and who wished to communicate and record that difference in

9 See Herring.

10 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

their writing and the manner that they saw the world differently as well. Scholars like McCoy and Scarano have claimed that the American empire in the East was, in some respects, a distinctive kind of imperial state – a claim that echoes America's early claims to exceptionalism and uniqueness. But as this is a book about books, my intention is to offer a close reading of the works that were produced by the American writers who wrote about Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. As such this work will focus on the content, tone and tenor of the writings that were produced by these American authors for the benefit of their fellow American readers at home; to see if there was anything distinctive about the works themselves, and if it could be said that there was a particular American understanding of Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century.

Before proceeding further I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who have been my fellow-travellers in this journey back to the past.

My thanks go to Saskia Gieling and Jaap Wagenaar of Amsterdam University Press for supporting my work over the years, and it goes without saying that this work would not have seen the light of day without their help and encouragement. I am also indebted to Chris Hale, producer and writer, with whom I have worked over the past five years in the related domain of film-making, and whom I have to thank for giving me the opportunity to translate some of my earlier work into documentary format for a wider audience. Chris has been more than a friend and supporter; and our discussions on the history and politics of Southeast Asia often dragged on late into the night. Together we travelled across Southeast Asia and Europe as we recounted the long and complex story of Europe's arrival in the East, and taxing though our journeys have been the final results were tangible and worthy of the effort.

My thanks also go to Rachel Harrison, Peter Carey and Martin van Bruinessen, whose works on Southeast Asia – past and present – have been so important in shaping and directing my own research. Rachel's work on Southeast Asian literature and film has been instructive in so many ways, reminding me of the power of narratives and language, and how our socio-political realities are discursively constructed. Peter's work in the recovery of the forgotten stories and narratives of Southeast Asia has been crucial in determining the focus of my work as well, for he has reminded me time and again that the power of narratives is found in political structures and differentials of power. Martin has been a friend, mentor and brother to me in so many ways, and it is thanks to him that my interest in Southeast Asia was rekindled two decades ago. In so many ways all of them have always

been close to me as I laboured away in my office. By way of acknowledging their presence in my work, I would like to thank all of them from the bottom of my heart.

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In Europe I would like to thank the friends and colleagues whose hospitality I truly appreciated, and without whose help I would not have been able to conduct my research in the archives there: Christele Dedebant, Akanksha Mehta, Eric Germain, Violaine Donadello Szapary, Romain Bertrand, Wim Manuhutu, Marije Plomp, Willemijn Lamp, Chris Keulemans, Laila Zwaini, Dietrich Reetz, Saskia Schafer, Dominik Muller, Pablo Butcher and not least the late Henry Brownrigg, whose friendship I shall dearly miss. I would also like to thank Pierre Brocheux, whose extraordinary work on French Indochina was illuminating in so many ways, and which reminded me of how complex and nuanced the realities of colonialism were.

In Japan I would like to thank my friend and colleague Haruko Satoh, with whom I have had the enormous pleasure of working at OSIPP, Osaka University. Not to be forgotten are my academic friends in Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo who have hosted me, and it is thanks to them that I learned so much about Japan's own rise as a Pacific power, which happens to be a concurrent theme in this book. My gratitude goes to Kazufumi Nagatsu, Shinzo Hayase, Naoki Soda, Misako Ito, Koji Sato, Mitsuhiro Inada, Carmina Yu Untalan and the staff of the National Diet Library and the Toyo Bunko Oriental Library of Tokyo.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleagues and students with whom I have had the pleasure to work with and teach at RSIS, and whose enthusiasm helped me stay focused on my work. My thanks go to Nicholas

Chan, Oleg Korovin, Abhishek Mehrotra, Maria Ronald, Prashant Waikar, Iulia Lumina, Alex Bookbinder, Ram Ganesh Kamatham, Vincent Mack, Carli Teteris, Randy Wirasta Nadyatama, Benny Beskara, Sean Galloway, Annie Yong, Adri Wanto, Anais Prudent, Rohit Muthiah and all my other students in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Last but not least, I have my wife, Amy, to thank for keeping me on the sane and lucid path. For the past three years my time and energy has been absorbed by two works that were written together at the same time, leaving me marooned in my office for nights on end. My failing health, and the maritime theme of the books, reinforced the impression that I was a leaky old rustbucket, foxed along the edges, lost at sea. During that period when I laboured alone it was the thought of Amy, and returning home to her, that kept me going; and it was Amy, my mother and my daughters who reminded me of what was truly important in life. I have them to thank for showing me that there is, after all, life after the nineteenth century.

Farish A. Noor
RSIS, January 2018

1 The curtain rises

America's independence and the birth of a new naval power

> The enduring idea of an isolationist America is a myth often conveniently used to safeguard the nation's self-image of its innocence.[1]
> – George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*

1.I 'To be considered as Actors on a most conspicuous Theatre': America's genesis and the world beyond

> Men make history, and the leading members of the revolutionary generation realized that they were doing so, but they could never have known the history they were making. [...] What in retrospect has the look of a foreordained unfolding of God's will was in reality an improvisational affair in which sheer chance, pure luck – both good and bad – and specific decisions made in the crucible of political crises determined the outcome. [...] If hindsight enhances our appreciation for the solidity and stability of the [historical] legacy, it also blinds us to the stunning improbability of the achievement itself.[2]
> – Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers:The Revolutionary Generation*

The works that we will be looking at in this book were all written by Americans in the nineteenth century; from Jeremiah Reynolds' *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac (1835) and Francis Warriner's *Cruise of the Frigate* Potomac *round the World* (1835) to Edmund Roberts' *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat* (1837), Fitch W. Taylor's *The Flag Ship, or, A Voyage around the World in the United States Frigate* Columbia (1840), Walter M. Gibson's *The Prison of Weltevreden* (1856), Albert Smith Bickmore's *Travels in the East Indian Archipelago* (1869) and Frank Vincent's *The Land of the White Elephant* (1874). They were written at a time when Americans had little first-hand knowledge of the world in general and American writers were beginning to write about the wider world from an American perspective for an American audience back home. But long before the United States of America established a presence in Southeast Asia and became an Asia-Pacific power, it had to secure a means to get to Asia first. How that came about, and how America made contact with Southeast Asia,

1 Herring, p. 1.
2 Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, pp. 4-5.

is a complex story that needs to be told in stages; and it takes us all the way back to the birth of the United States itself. This requires a recounting of events in the past, though we sometimes forget that at the genesis of things, the world was a fuzzy place indeed.

During the Presidency of Barrack Obama, there was much talk about America's 'Pivot to Asia' and the need for America to re-assert its role in the East and Southeast Asian regions. Much of this talk was accompanied by the claim that America had long since been around the region, and had played an important role in determining the development of Asia in modern times. But how true is this claim, and how did America make its presence felt in Asia in the nineteenth century? What were America's attitudes to Asia and Asians, and how did the early Americans view themselves and their role in the Southeast Asia in particular?

On 6 October 1784 the *Massachusetts Centinel and the Republican Journal*, a federalist newspaper published by William Warden and Benjamin Russell, featured a lengthy report on the war in India waged by the British East India Company. Included in that issue was an 'extraordinary insert' that reproduced in full the plea by the wife of Almar Ali Cawn, who had been captured by British forces. Ali Cawn's wife had written a petition to Britain's King George III, but the *Centinel* noted that the plea was turned down. The editors of the *Centinel* were supportive of the Indians and hostile to the British, and the report added that 'The petition was presented by the unhappy woman to the great man [King George], who, after he had perused it, gave orders that Almar Ali Cawn should be immediately strangled, and those orders were immediately executed. May the curse of the widow and the fatherless pursue him.'[3] The heavy editorializing that went into the report was indicative of the mood in America then, and how some Americans viewed Britain, India and Asia by extension. The *Centinel* made it abundantly clear that it felt that Britain's involvement in the Indian subcontinent was a case of imperial adventurism. That it expressed sympathy for the Indians and rained its curses upon King George says something about how some Americans were wholly opposed to empire-building then. Yet in a space of a century such attitudes were destined to change, and the country that had initially professed neutrality and the principle of non-intervention would ultimately become a colonial power as well.

3 The *Massachusetts Centinel and the Republican Journal*, William Warden and Benjamin Russell publishers, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 October 1784. 'Extraordinary Insert', pp. 1-2. Anti-British sentiment would remain a feature of the *Centinel*, even after it transformed to the *Columbian Centinel* (1790-1840).

This book looks at America's role and presence in Southeast Asia between the 1800 to 1900, and will argue that America in the nineteenth century was, in fact, a country with an identity and purpose that was in some ways different from the America that we know today; not least for the simple reason that America was itself a country-in-the-making. One work that looks at the state of America during its founding years is Joseph Ellis' *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (2002), which paints a sobering image of the young republic. A decade after its founding the population of the United States stood at less than four million, of which 693,250 were slaves. They were in turn surrounded by Native Americans who were ironically not Americans citizens.[4] The founding fathers had envisaged a country that had no king and no aristocracy, and where all citizens were equals.[5] (Though equality did not extend to Native Americans or the slaves who were regarded as property.) It was a country brought together by revolution and held together by the sinews of federalism, one that had no capital until Washington, DC, was chosen for that role. In 1790 the US's total debt stood at 77.1 million dollars, of which 11.7 million dollars was owed to foreign governments.[6] As Gordon has noted, after the revolution the American economy was in profound recession.[7] Notwithstanding its diminutive population and its huge debt, America's leaders were convinced that theirs was a nation that was destined for great things, and to play a larger role in the world in the long run. George Washington had written that:

> The citizens of America have been placed in the most enviable condition, as the sole Lords and Proprietors of a Vast tract of Continent, comprehending all the various soils and climates of the World, and abounding with all the necessities and conveniences of life. [...] They are, from this period, to be considered as Actors on a most conspicuous Theatre, which seems to be peculiarly designed by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity.[8]

It seemed then that the conditions were right for a new nation to be born, and as Ellis pointed out, 'if the infant American republic could survive its infancy, if it could manage to endure as a coherent national identity long

4 Herring, p. 57.
5 Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, p. 13.
6 Ibid., p. 55.
7 Gordon, p. xvii.
8 Quoted in Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, p. 7.

enough to consolidate its natural advantages, it possessed the potential to become a dominant force in the world'.[9] But America's birth was a painful and violent one, as Hoock has noted, and from its genesis Americans defined themselves in oppositional terms to those who they regarded as their enemies within and without – which included not only Britain and the powers of continental Europe, but also the Native American communities and black slaves who lived beside them.[10]

America's growth coincided with its first forays into the wider world, and how America's encounter with one part of the world – Southeast Asia – shaped, informed and determined the identity of both. It is a story with its own cast of characters – states, kingdoms and individuals – and laced with hazard and chance. In the manner that is shows how contingency often disrupts the best-laid plans of the wise and the bold, it is a useful reminder of the need to resist a linear reading of history too. America and Americans would indeed become 'actors on a most conspicuous theatre' as George Washington had foretold, but the plays they enacted and the scripts they read were not penned by a singular author.

To recount the story of America's early encounter with Southeast Asia we would need to go back to the beginning. Turning the clock back to the early nineteenth century we find an America that was poised to greet a new world. But as the young republic looked to the horizon and dreamt of crossing the seas, it had a particular problem: It was wanting of a navy.

1.II The birth of a new naval power

Our detached and distant situation invites and
enables us to pursue a different course.
– George Washington's Farewell Address

In the year 1800, the United States of America – a young country made up of newly-independent states – was almost entirely defenceless at sea. Just how and why America was bereft of a naval force that could defend its territorial waters and merchant shipping abroad is a complex story, but it begins with the story of another force – the Continental Navy and the Continental Marines – that was created earlier, and then disbanded.

9 Ibid., p. 7.
10 See Hoock.

During America's War of Independence it became abundantly clear that the American colonies would continue to be on the defensive as long as Britain was able to send troops and supplies across the North Atlantic to beef up its forces in North America and to battle against the revolutionaries. The US Department of War (set up in 1789) was created to ensure that the American army would remain under civilian control, and George Washington had assumed the role of commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. But it was John Adams who appreciated the need to form a navy in order to disrupt the flow of reinforcements being sent from Britain. On 26 August 1775 the State Assembly of Rhode Island passed the first resolution calling for the creation of an American naval force. The plan was to create a single American Continental fleet that would be funded by the Continental Congress, and on 13 October the force was established. Initially made up of merchant ships of various classes – from sloops to schooners – the Continental Navy's origins were humble. Congress called for the purchase of ships, which included the war brig USS *Andrew Doria* (which was the first American ship to receive a gun salute from another country, at the Dutch port of Fort Oranje in the Caribbean[11]); and later on 10 November two battalions of marines were raised to aid and assist American ships-of-war. Later thirteen new frigates were ordered by Congress (in December 1775), but the grand plans of Congress were thwarted by the economic realities of the time: Only eight frigates were finally completed, and none of them were a match for the first- and second-raters of the Royal Navy.

Out-gunned at sea, the ships of the Continental Navy directed their attention to the merchant ships and supply vessels that were coming from Britain instead. American vessels raided British merchantmen and supply ships along the American coast all the way south to the Caribbean – where they found themselves in the company of French privateers who were equally happy to plunder and capture English ships. Notwithstanding their successes at sea – one of the most notable being the combined operation between the Continental Navy and the Continental Marines in their joint attack on Nassau in March 1776, where they seized the town and captured 88 British guns – the American naval forces were not able to defeat the British Navy.

11 On 16 November 1776 the American brig-of-war the USS *Andrew Doria* approached the Dutch port of Fort Oranje, which was then under the command of the Dutch governor Johannes de Graaff. The ship fired the first salutary salvo, and this was met by an eleven-gun salute from the port. The event was of considerable importance to both the crew of the ship and the American government, for it was the first time another country had officially recognized the new American flag on a vessel.

Following Britain's defeat on land, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Paris (in 1783) that ended the Revolutionary War. Shortly after it was decided that the Continental Navy would eventually be disbanded, and in 1785 the eleven American ships that had survived the war were dismantled or sold off. Without a navy to defend its coastline, America's only form of naval defence then was the United States Revenue Cutter (USRC) service, which was established by Congress in November 1790 under the direction of Alexander Hamilton – who was then Secretary to the Treasury.[12] America could not afford a large naval force; and the young federation of states was made up of newly-independent ex-colonies that were jealously guarding their interests. Among the first generation of American citizens, there was some concern about the creation of a new federal system that would alienate the powers of the states to Congress, and rumblings against the creation of 'big government' where power – including military and naval power – would be concentrated at the political centre, or in the hands of an individual.[13]

America was then a young nation without much of a core identity – save that of being former colonies; and surrounded by European powers with vast empires that extended all the way to America's doorstep. As Herring pointed out, 'in a world of empires, the republic had to find ways to survive'.[14] But how? America was a fledgling nation-in-making, and at this stage of its history had no expansionist ambitions. It was the only nation in the Northern Atlantic theatre without a naval force that could be reckoned with, and it was about to learn that its discourse of free trade and freedom of navigation – to quote Hobbes – 'were but words, with no power to bind them'. But words did matter, and one word that mattered very much during the first decades of America's history was the word 'neutrality'.

The slow birth of the United States – from the declaration of independence in 1776 to the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783 – produced a federation of thirteen states, each with a history and identity of its own. America's founding fathers were revolutionaries who had fought to rid themselves of the yoke of colonial rule, and there was the prevailing opinion

12 Johnson, *Guardians*.

13 George Washington himself had warned the American public – in his Farewell Address of 1796 – of the dangers of internal political conflict that may lead to the rise of powerful individuals in the republic. In his farewell note, he wrote that 'the disorders and miseries, which result [from political infighting], gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty' (George Washington's Farewell Address).

14 Herring, p. 37.

that America should never become an imperial power itself. This sentiment was shared by some of the country's leaders like George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and it was almost elevated to an article of faith, as one of the founding principles of the new democracy. It was Washington himself who laid down the framework of American neutrality and isolationism, and in his Farewell Address (1796) he spelt out his meaning in no uncertain terms:

> Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and Morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be, that good policy does not equally enjoin it? It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and, at no distant period, a great Nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt, that, in the course of time and things, the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages, which might be lost by a steady adherence to it?[15]

Underlying this understanding of neutrality was a very American appreciation of geography and its location in the world. Washington, along with several other leaders of the revolutionary generation, saw America as a land apart, far away from the Old World of continental Europe; and had no wish to see the new country embroiled in the conflicts that were raging there. It was America's 'detachment and distant situation', Washington argued, that gave America the unique opportunity to chart another course altogether.

Despite all the talk of neutrality and isolationism by the founding fathers, Herring has argued that the first generation of American leaders were acutely aware of the importance of global politics. Tom Paine's call for independence 'hinged on estimates of the importance of the [American] colonies in the international system of the eighteenth century' and this anticipated the importance of foreign policy in America's own war of independence and the future development of its identity.[16] As Herring observed: 'the Revolutionary generation held to an expansive vision, a certainty to their future greatness and destiny'.[17] The republic needed to expand, and the need for an effective means to protect America's territorial waters and its merchant fleet would become increasingly obvious in the decades that followed. The Constitution was the first step towards remedying America's military weakness, for it

15 George Washington's Farewell Address.
16 Herring, p. 11.
17 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

'conferred on the central government authority to regulate commerce and conduct relations with other nations'.[18]

America's profession of neutrality was put to the test as the country fought its quasi-war with France with the Caribbean as the main theatre of conflict. It was in the West Indies that the United States bore the brunt of France's aggressive policy against maritime trade with Britain, and American ships were not spared. American estimates of their losses – both in the form of ships captured and cargo plundered in the Caribbean by the French – between 1794 to 1797 stood at around 25 million dollars.[19] Compounding matters for the American government and its business community then was the fact that the United States did not have a navy to speak of: Six frigates had been ordered in 1794,[20] but by 1797 only three were completed and on active service: the USS *Constitution*, USS *Constellation* and USS *United States*. (The following year the Department of the Navy was formally established, on 30 April 1798.)

As America was keen to expand its trading networks and trade with as many nations as possible, its ships were plying the trade routes from the West Indies all the way to the Mediterranean. It was off the coast of North Africa that American merchant vessels found themselves harassed, and sometimes captured, by the so-called 'Barbary pirates' of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. The pirates of the North African coast had been the scourge of shipping for centuries, and American vessels were targeted too. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both agreed that the American government's policy of paying tribute to piratical states was, in the long run, unsustainable for both economic and ethical reasons: The tributes were an enormous drain on the coffers of the state, and the annual payment of tribute merely reinforced the view that piracy was a lucrative means of making money. The problem, however, was that America did not have the means to protect its merchant vessels and was in no position to refuse the demands of the pirates. (The American government would continue to pay tribute to Algiers for fifteen years, from 1786 to 1800.) The threat of piracy was one of the main reasons that Congress approved the plan to build six new heavy frigates in 1794, to serve as escorts to America's growing merchant

18 Ibid., p. 57.

19 Fregosi, p. 140.

20 On 27 March 1794, Congress passed the Naval Act of 1794, which authorized the construction of six new heavy frigates that would make up the nucleus of the new American Navy. These were the USS *Constitution* (44, then later 54 guns), USS *United States* (44 guns), USS *President* (44 guns), USS *Chesapeake* (44 guns), USS *Constellation* (36 guns) and the USS *Congress* (36 guns). The cost of the six vessels was high by the standards of the day, amounting to $688,000.00.

fleet. When Thomas Jefferson assumed office as the third President of the United States (1801-1809), he ordered that the payment of tribute be stopped, which was the catalyst to the First Barbary War between America and Tripoli. Jefferson turned to Congress for support for his new policy on piracy, and in 1802 the Act for the Protection of Commerce and Seamen of the United States was passed. Aware that it was solely responsible for the safety of its own ships, crews and cargo, the American government began to build a new navy of its own in order to defend its interests, and to be less dependent on the goodwill of European allies.

Notwithstanding America's desire not to take sides in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe (1798-1802 and 1802-1815), the conflict incurred a cost on America's trade with European countries. American ships were blocked from moving freely across the Northern Atlantic (sometimes by British ships that were stationed just off the American coast), and to add insult to injury American vessels were also being boarded and searched by British warships on the lookout for deserters. (The most notorious instance of this took place in 1807 when the British warship HMS *Leopard* boarded the American vessel USS *Chesapeake*.) But it was the restrictions on American trade with France that irked American merchants and politicians the most, who argued that such restrictions went against the principles of free trade and freedom of navigation.[21]

The British were hardly reliable allies too: Britain's worry about an ever-growing America was one of the reasons that it supported the creation of an independent Native American state to block the westward expansion of American territory – and this was also one of the catalysts to the American-British War of 1812.[22] One of the consequences of the War of 1812 was the growing realization that America required a powerful navy, and soon after the end of the war in 1815 Congress ordered the construction of three new ships-of-the-line and two new frigates. The following year, plans were laid for the production of nine more ships-of-the-line and twelve heavy frigates. Thus by the first quarter of the nineteenth century the United States of America had come to appreciate the need for a navy that would be able to defend its waters and to project American power further than ever before.

21 By 1811 the American press was already beginning to feature articles that were sympathetic to Napoleon's cause. The Boston-based broadsheet *The Repertory*, for instance, featured the entire speech by Napoleon where Napoleon insisted that France had made appeals to Britain to end the conflict between them, and that France had no choice but to impose a blockade on Britain and to prevent any commercial exchange between that country and other nations. See 'Latest from France: Retaliation', *The Repertory*, Boston, 11 May 1811.

22 See Hickey; Thompson and Randall.

It was during this period, which Paul Fregosi has described as 'the imperial dawning of the USA', that America began to embark on the arduous process of becoming a maritime power.[23] The end of the Anglo-American War of 1812 coincided with the end of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, and with the cessation of hostilities on both sides of the Atlantic the map of the world had changed considerably and decisively. Fregosi has noted that

> the long-range effects of the Napoleonic Wars were shattering to the established order in Central and South America as well. The sale of Louisiana turned out to be a disaster for Mexico. A French-ruled Louisiana would have been a buffer between the dynamic, acquisitive and assertive United States. The French departure opened the way for the Americans who over the next four decades and in the name of their 'manifest destiny' took half of Mexico for themselves, all the way west to California.[24]

As the United States expanded its territory it also sought to gain influence in the Gulf of Mexico, and protect its maritime trade routes across the Northern Atlantic. The result of this succession of wars – the Quasi-War with France, the First and Second Barbary Wars and the War of 1812 with Britain – was the birth of what would eventually become the American Navy. America's new navy was still much smaller than that of Britain, France, Holland and Spain, but it was now prepared to venture across the wider world; and as it did so American neutrality would be defended by 12-pounders.

1.III Between expansionism and isolationism: America's neutrality tested

America's sally across the Atlantic and the Pacific was a prolonged series of encounters where the country's identity would be framed against an Other, and it was a time when American neutrality – a foundational idea that was the bedrock of the new republic – was tried and tested. As Herring has noted: 'to proclaim neutrality was one thing, to implement it quite another'.[25] As much as the first generation of American leaders wanted to maintain a neutral stand vis-à-vis other states, they were also driven by other goals that seemed equally important at the time: Free trade and

23 Fregosi, p. 435.
24 Ibid., p. 469.
25 Herring, p. 69.

freedom of movement. But free trade necessarily meant trading with others; and trading with others necessarily meant leaving the comfort zone that was home and making forays into the unknown. As Herring has argued, Americans had mixed feelings about the world beyond their shores, and their place in the grand scheme of things:

> Americans held decidedly mixed views about the international order and their place in it. On the one hand, they have been allured by the riches of the world. [...] Adopting ideas from European Enlightenment thinkers, some even saw free trade as a means to transform the very nature of international life. On the other hand, Americans have often seen themselves as a people apart.[26]

Pacifying the sea and rendering it a *safe* space for navigation and commerce had always been a concern for the United States, and this can be dated back to the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation (otherwise known as Jay's Treaty) with Britain that was tabled in 1794. In the treaty's preamble it was clearly stated that the aim of the treaty was 'to regulate the Commerce and Navigation between Their respective Countries, Territories and People, in such a manner as to render the same reciprocally beneficial and satisfactory'. The American government was keen to ensure that American ships would not be handicapped in any way as they made their way to British ports, and Article 13 of the treaty stated that American merchants in Britain would not have to pay duties higher than their British counterparts.[27] Article 14 then stated that there should be 'reciprocal and perfect liberty of commerce and navigation' for merchants and mariners of both nations, and that American ships should have the freedom to operate in 'the Lands, Countries, Cities, Ports Places and Rivers within the Dominions and Territories' of Britain, which included Britain's colonies in the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent and other parts of Asia.[28] Though reciprocity and equal treatment were the conditions that both sides insisted upon, there were instances in the treaty where the American government fell back on exceptionalism, as in

26 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

27 'The Citizens of the United States shall pay for their Vessels when admitted into the said Ports, no other or higher Tonnage Duty than shall be payable on British Vessels when admitted into the Ports of the United States. And they shall pay no other or higher Duties or Charges on the importation or exportation of the Cargoes of the said Vessels, than shall be payable on the same articles when imported or exported in British Vessels' ('Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation', Article 13).

28 Ibid., Article 14.

its prohibition on the trade of molasses, sugar, coffee and cotton to any other part of the world except the United States.[29]

Signed and ratified between 1794 to 1795, the architects of the treaty – the Right Honourable William Wyndham, Baron Grenville of Wotton and John Jay, Chief Justice of the United States – did not foresee the conflicts to come. The Jay Treaty was intended to normalize relations between Britain and her former American colonies, but Britain could not extricate itself from the conflicts that were taking place in Europe. And as Herring has pointed out, 'whatever the long-term benefits, the Jay Treaty afforded the United States no immediate respite'.[30] As much as America wanted to remain neutral and continue to trade with the European states in peace, the Napoleonic Wars made that virtually impossible. Legal instruments like the Non-Importation Act (28 October 1806) and the Embargo Act (22 December 1807) did little to solve the problems that were faced by the Jefferson administration.[31] Britain and France were still able to trade with their colonies in the Caribbean and South America, but American businesses lost opportunities to trade with Europe. The Embargo Act was eventually nullified in early 1809 as Jefferson faced his last days in office. The Non-Intercourse Act that was passed on 1 March 1809 proved to be equally ineffective, and three days later Thomas Jefferson's presidency came to an end. By 1810, with James Madison in the presidential office (1809-1817), America attempted to revive trade with both Britain and France, but by then relations with Britain had soured.[32] Like Jefferson, Madison was also criticized for his handling of trade relations with Europe, and true neutrality proved to be an elusive goal.

Perhaps neutrality was an idea best kept out of the messy dealings between states, and the American government learned just how messy inter-state relations could be when American merchant ships were being attacked by pirates and privateers in the Caribbean. In the 1820s, as the Spanish empire collapsed and South America was transformed into a patchwork of new states, American vessels were confronted by a new threat: the pirates and privateers that operated from the ports of new countries like Haiti, Venezuela, Puerto Rico

29 This prohibition was raised in Article 12, where it was stated that 'the United States will prohibit and restrain the carrying any Melasses, Sugar, Coffee, Cocoa or Cotton in American vessels, either from His Majesty's Islands or from the United States, to any part of the World, except the United States, reasonable Sea Stores excepted'.

30 Herring, p. 81.

31 See Levy.

32 During the War of 1812 the American government made several attempts to restrict trade with Britain, which came in the form of the Enemy Trade Act of 1812 and the second Embargo Act of 1813. See Perkins.

and the Dominican Republic.[33] The anti-piracy campaign in the Caribbean eventually ended with some degree of success, and by 1825 piracy – though not eradicated – had been brought under control. The West Indies Squadron, however, bore the brunt of the effort. It was an important period in American naval history, as the American Navy learned the importance of co-ordinated attacks and working in squadron formation. Some of the ships that were part of the squadron – such as the sloop-of-war USS *Peacock* – would later sail even further, and take part in America's first encounters with Southeast Asia.

1.IV Marking borders and stepping out: Southeast Asia awaits

America's complex relationship with Southeast Asia dated all the way back to a time when America did not even exist as an independent country: Following the end of the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667), and the signing of the Treaty of Breda (31 July 1667) the Dutch handed over the territory of Manhattan to the British, in exchange for Pulau Run in the Moluccas – the fabled Spice Islands so coveted by the European powers.[34] Such connections, however distant, were maintained while the American colonies were part of Britain's empire, but in the first decades of the nineteenth century the new American republic was a fledgling nation that had yet to make its mark upon the world.

America's size had grown as a result of the purchase of Louisiana, but to the south and west were the remnants of the Spanish empire (that were on the brink of revolution and about to break free themselves). When James Monroe came to power as the fifth President of the United States (1817-1825), Alabama had just been created and Mississippi was about to become the twentieth state of the United States. America also found itself surrounded by new neighbours: Haiti gained its independence in 1804, becoming the first independent republic in the Caribbean; and in 1816 the United Provinces of South America unilaterally declared their independence from Spain. In 1819 Simón Bolívar proclaimed the independence of Gran Colombia, and in rapid succession the Spanish empire fell apart with the birth of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Mexico. In both North and South America a new world was being built upon the ruins of the old European empires. America's concerns then were focused inwards as it consolidated its own federalism

33 The cost of the West Indies anti-piracy campaign were high, as were the costs incurred on American merchant shipping: In 1820 alone 27 American commercial vessels were lost to pirates in the Caribbean.

34 Bernstein, pp. 110-129.

and expanded its territory to the West, but it remained apprehensive about the potential threat of Europe's return to its shores. It was with this thought in mind that James Monroe issued his famous warning to the powers of the old continent, in his seventh State of the Union Address, that has come to be known as the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.[35]

While America had access to the Caribbean, the United States' venture into the Pacific was a long-drawn affair. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the United States was confined to the eastern coast of the continent, and America looked to the North Atlantic as the corridor that connected it to Europe. America still had no direct access to the west coast of the North American continent, and the prospect of sending any vessel – naval or commercial – to the Pacific was a daunting one, as any such vessel would have to travel all the way along the coast of South America.

In 1821 plans were laid for the formation of the Pacific Squadron of the American Navy. Captain John Downes was the first Commander-in-Chief of the squadron, followed by Captain Charles Goodwin Ridgeley, and then Commodore Charles Stewart. The main task of the Pacific Squadron was to protect American shipping that operated along the Pacific coast of the American continent; and at this stage of American history the prospect of establishing trade relations with the countries of East and Southeast Asia seemed a long way off. America's belated arrival in Southeast Asia meant that by the time the country was making its first forays there the region was already somewhat overcrowded and was being hotly contested by the European powers: Britain and France had both tried to gain control of India, and the rivalry between the two warring powers spilled into both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia as well. Spain was well established in the Philippines and the Dutch had long secured their monopoly on the East Indies spice trade (with their position in the Moluccas virtually unassailable) as well as Java. But much of Southeast Asia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was still up for grabs, and there were many parts of the region that had yet to come under the yoke of European colonial rule.

Burma, for instance, had yet to be reduced to the status of a British colony and for a century it had been the battleground for competing British and French interests. Britain's presence was also felt along the Malay Peninsula. The first British settlement in Southeast Asia was Penang, which was claimed by Francis Light – who was acting on behalf of the British East India Company – in 1786.[36] In 1819 another East India Company-man, Stamford

35 See Murphy.
36 See Bonney.

Raffles, along with William Farquhar, gained control of Singapore, which was later turned into a free port and would eventually become the main base of British operations in maritime Southeast Asia.[37] Malacca was handed over to the British by the Dutch, and following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 the Straits Settlements were created in 1826. Though Britain – via the East India Company – had gained control of three of the most important ports along the Western coast of the Malay Peninsula, Britain's 'forward movement' into the Malay kingdoms had yet to begin.[38] The East India Company was more interested in the trading centres along the eastern coast of Sumatra, and to that end several expeditions were made to ascertain the level of economic activity there, and to see whether Britain could establish new trading partners in Sumatra – one of the most successful missions was that of John Anderson,[39] who managed to compile one of the most detailed economic reports on East Sumatra that was ever written then.[40]

Holland's hold on Southeast Asia at the time was not as extensive as it would later be: At the beginning of the nineteenth century Dutch power was concentrated mainly in Java, the strategic port of Bangka and the Moluccas.[41] With Sumatra earmarked as de facto Dutch territory, the Dutch began to expand their influence on the island. Following the Padri War of 1821-1838, the Minangkabau highlands would come under Dutch control, though much of central and northern Sumatra would remain fiercely independent up to the early twentieth century. The Dutch also expanded their power and influence to the other islands of the archipelago, and this would later lead to the Banjarmasin War of 1859-1863, the attacks on Bali in 1846, 1848, 1849, 1906 and 1908, and the capture of Lombok in 1894. Sulawesi was finally occupied by 1906 and West Papua only came under Dutch rule in 1920.

Though Holland's advance across the archipelago was ponderous, the Dutch were zealous in the protection of their colonies and reluctant to share their colonial possessions with other Western nations.[42] In Java, the Dutch

37 Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar negotiated with the Temenggong of Johor and managed to acquire Singapore for the East India Company in return for the EIC's support of the Johor ruler Raja Hussein Shah. Hussein Shah was paid an annual sum of $5,000 for his part in the deal and the other Temenggongs $3,000 annually.

38 See Osborn.

39 See Anderson.

40 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

41 See, for instance, Nieuhof.

42 In the 1820s there were relatively few works on Java and the Dutch East Indies in the English language. The two works best known at the time were Thomas Stamford Raffles' *The History of Java*, which was published by John Murray, Albemarle Street, London, in 1817, and John Joseph Stockdale's *Sketches, Civil and Military, of the Island of Java and Its Immediate Dependencies,*

had imposed many regulations and conditions on non-Dutch Westerners and non-Javanese Asian migrants and merchants who chose to live and work there.[43] Up to the nineteenth century, non-Dutch Westerners were prevented from travelling freely beyond the major port cities like Batavia (Jakarta), and other European merchants and professionals found it difficult to make a living in the Dutch colony. Americans fared no better, and the Dutch colonial authorities in the East Indies were as apprehensive about American manoeuvres in their backyard as they were about the machinations of the British and the Spanish. Through their network of local police, spies and informants, the Dutch closely monitored the movements of other Westerners in their territory, and as we shall see later this sometimes led to situations where foreigners – including Americans – were accused of illegal dealings and espionage.

Only one other European power had managed to grab and hold on to a part of the Indonesian archipelago, and that was Portugal. The Portuguese, who competed with the Spanish, had arrived in Timor in 1515 and had managed to hold on to the eastern half of the island. Portugal's other major possession, Malacca – that was conquered by them in 1511 – was later lost to the Dutch; but in East Timor the Portuguese had managed to penetrate deeper, bringing Catholicism as well as an export-oriented agrarian colonial economy founded on the production of maize and coffee. From 1702 East Timor was officially part of the Portuguese empire with its own governor. Having lost almost all of their possessions in Southeast Asia, the Portuguese were not about to share what little they had left with anyone else.

Another part of Southeast Asia that was off limits to the Americans in the early nineteenth century was the Philippines, which had come under Spanish influence for three centuries. The Spanish had first arrived in the Philippines in 1521, thanks to the expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan,[44] and over the next three centuries built for themselves a colony that was modelled on the administrative system of feudal Spain. The territory was divided into provinces that answered to the Governor-General, whose administration in turn answered to the King of Spain and the Consejo de las Indias (Council of the Indies). In 1565 the Spanish introduced the galleon

Comprising Interesting Details of Batavia and Authentic Particulars of the Celebrated Poison-Tree, published privately at 41 Pall Mall. London, in 1812. The most outstanding work on Sumatra was William Marsden's *The History of Sumatra, Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs, and Manners of the Native Inhabitants*, printed in London in 1784, and was by then relatively out of date.

43 See Lohanda.

44 Pigafetta, *Megellan's Voyage: A Narrative*; Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage around the World*.

trade which connected Spanish Philippines to Mexico, and it was this vital trade route – it connected Southeast Asia to Mexico to the Caribbean and finally to Europe across the North Atlantic – that accounted for the vast wealth that Spain was able to accumulate from its Southeast Asian and American colonies, making it the envy of Europe. Scott notes that slaves were also among the goods that were bought and sold via the galleon trade then, and slaves procured in the Philippines were taken and sold away at places as far as Mexico.[45] Following the American revolution and the birth of the United States, the Spanish government grew increasingly worried about the fate of its own vast empire, which stretched from South America to Southeast Asia. Wary of the revolutionary ideas of both the French and American revolutions, Spain resisted the calls for independence that were growing louder in its colonies.[46] The loss of those colonies, and the emergence of new states like Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico, meant that Spain's hold on the Philippines – the furthest of its colonies – grew weaker by the day. Thus it was no surprise if the Spanish colonial government in the Philippines regarded America with the same suspicious eye that cast its European rivals in a negative light.

If there was one European country that *could* have been on good terms with America then, it would have been France. France had, after all, given both material and naval support to the Americans during the American War of Independence, and there were many in America who professed sympathy for the French revolution. America continued to trade with France during the Napoleonic Wars, and both countries were keen to improve bilateral economic relations. But France was also an ambitious power and had been engaged in a long struggle against Britain in Asia. In India and Burma, French ambitions were thwarted thanks to the vicissitudes of war in Europe, and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century France would be edged out of Burma for good. It was to another part of mainland Southeast Asia that France turned to in order to reverse its fortunes: Indochina.

France's involvement in Indochina dated back to the seventeenth century with the arrival of the first Jesuits led by Alexandre de Rhodes. Thanks in part to the role played by the Jesuits and their missions, France was able to build trading stations and outposts along the coast, and by the eighteenth century was engaged in trade there.[47] Though the French would later grow

45 Scott, pp. 24-26, 37.

46 See Holden and Zolov.

47 Catholic priests like Pierre Pigneau were able to persuade the French government to send troops and aid to several Vietnamese rulers who faced the threat of rebellion and conquest.

more aggressive in the dealings with the Vietnamese – culminating in the attack on Da Nang by the forces of French Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly in 1858 and the eventual colonization of Indochina – in the first quarter of the nineteenth century France was still unable to impose its rule in that part of Southeast Asia. France was on the lookout for a Southeast Asian colony of its own – partly in order to gain direct access to the market in China – and the country that provided France with the reinforcements it needed for the conquest of Indochina was not America, but Spain.[48]

America's profession of neutrality during this period meant that it was less inclined to be on the prowl, looking for new colonies to conquer. But American neutrality meant that it was kept at an equal distance by all the major European powers that were present in Asia: Britain, Holland, Spain, Portugal and France. This was the beginning of *American exceptionalism*, as noted by Tocqueville,[49] and a time when America wanted and needed to make itself known to the world as a country that was distinct and different from the old powers of Europe. America was the newcomer to Southeast Asia, in search of new Southeast Asian friends. But Southeast Asia was then a region beleaguered by the European powers, and the native polities were falling one by one. America had arrived just in time to witness the birth of a new, and often brutal, colonial order.

Thanks to the arrival of French supplies and reinforcements, the French were seen in a favourable light by Vietnamese rulers like Nguyen Anh.

48 France's justification for war in Indochina was the claim that the Vietnamese were about to expel all Catholic missions from the territory and to put an end to the work of the Jesuit colleges and Catholic missions there. Spain, being also a Catholic country, could be counted upon to aid and assist the French mission and during the campaign of 1858 several hundred Filipino soldiers were sent from Spanish Philippines to aid the French attack force that consisted of fourteen gunboats and more than 3,000 French troops.

49 See Tocqueville.

2 Pepper and gunboats

The Kuala Batu affair and America's first gunboat action in Southeast Asia

> But she [the United States of America] goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.[1]
> – John Quincy Adams, 'Speech to the US House of Representatives on Foreign Policy', 4 July 1821

2.I Boom! America's 'pepper rush' begins

In the year 1835 two books were published: Francis Warriner's *Cruise of the United States Frigate* Potomac *round the World, during the Years 1831-34, Embracing the Attack on Quallah Battoo, with Notices of Scenes, Manners, etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific*; and Jeremiah N. Reynolds' *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac*, Under the Command of Commodore John Downes, during the Circumnavigation of the Globe, in the Years 1831, 1832, 1833, and 1844; Including a Particular Account of the Engagement at Quallah-Battoo, on the Coast of Sumatra; with All the Official Documents Relating to the Same*. Both works were accounts of the journey made by the American Frigate USS *Potomac* around the world, and both of them focused on a specific event that took place in Sumatra, Southeast Asia, albeit seen and interpreted through perspectives that were quite different. That two books on the same subject could appear in the same year – with lengthy titles that would never pass the editor's scrutiny today – is telling in some ways. They were both works that were written by Americans about Americans abroad, and they hit the press at a time when American works on Asia were few and far between. Just how and why Warriner's and Reynolds' works were published then is a story that takes us back to the early nineteenth century, when America was beginning to find its way around the world and when America's desire for trade and commercial expansion collided with the geopolitical and geo-economic realities of a wider world it was only beginning to comprehend as an independent nation. It began with a boom, and it culminated with a bang: Namely, America's first act of aggression in Southeast Asia.

The chain of events that led to the *Potomac*'s gunboat action off the coast of Sumatra can be traced all the way back to 1797, when America's business

1 Adams, 'Speech'.

community was stunned by one of the greatest feats ever performed in the history of American mercantile shipping: The Massachusetts mariner, Captain Jonathan Carnes, had returned from the East Indies with the biggest haul of black peppercorns ever carried on an American vessel – 140,000 pounds of it – and his financiers earned a whopping 700 percent return on their investments.[2]

Carnes had left the port of Salem, Massachusetts, eighteen months earlier in November 1795 and was thought to have been lost at sea. (On a previous venture to India he had lost the ship that was under his command.) Unbeknownst to many, Carnes had discovered huge plantations of black pepper in northwest Sumatra, and set out for the East Indies on his commercial vessel *The Rajah*. When he reached Sumatra he was able to purchase an entire season's crop, and upon his return to America he sold the lot. Salem was transformed overnight into the pepper capital of North America, and Carnes went on to be one of the legendary figures who started the 'pepper rush' to Southeast Asia.[3]

Tried though he did to keep his route a secret, word eventually got out to the merchants of Salem that Jonathan Carnes had discovered the pepper plantations of Sumatra, and soon enough other investors were hiring captains, crews and ships to be outfitted for the long journey to Southeast Asia.[4] At the time, the journey from America to Southeast Asia was a perilous one indeed: To sail east across the North Atlantic would mean having to skirt past the dreaded Barbary pirates of the African coast, and make it past the European fleets that hovered around their respective bases in Africa and India. To sail west meant having to brave the pirates of the Caribbean and then get around the South American continent all the way to California (which was then not part of America) and then make the arduous journey across the Pacific all the way to China, and finally Southeast Asia. Either way, such an enterprise carried an enormous amount of risk: if the ocean did not swallow the ship, there were always privateers and enemy vessels on the prowl.

2 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 201.

3 'Jonathan Carnes Corners the Pepper Market in 1795', The New England Historical Society. Retrieved from: http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/jonathan-carnes-corners-pepper-market-1795/.

4 Reynolds noted the names of the first American ships that sailed to Southeast Asia, hoping to discover the same pepper plantations that had yielded such an enormous profit for the fortunate Captain Carnes. On 1 August 1797 the merchantman *Friendship* set sail to Sumatra, commanded by Captain J. Williams; on 9 May 1801 the *Active* set off, commanded by Captain G. Nichols; in 1802 the *Fanny* and the *John* sailed away, commanded by Captains E. Smith and J. Barton, respectively; and on 18 January 1805 the *Fame* followed the same route, commanded by Captain Briggs (Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 203-208).

But as we have seen in the previous chapter, free trade and freedom of navigation were crucial to America's understanding of itself, and would later be among the defining themes of American identity. If America were to survive and prosper, it had to trade; and through trade it would shore up its standing in the world. But between 1800 and the 1830s America's own naval power was paltry in comparison to the European powers, and it did not even have a port of its own along the Californian coast. American merchants relied on European nautical charts and maps; had to resupply wherever they could (assuming that foreign ports would allow them entry) and traded with whomever would do business with them. Out in Southeast Asia, America had no friends or allies; and from the Revolutionary Wars to the Napoleonic Wars British, French and Dutch ships were already blasting away at each other in earnest. American mariners were wary of going to a part of the world that they knew little about, and where they had no one to depend on save themselves.

American merchants braved the elements and pressed on to Southeast Asia. Their destination was the northwestern coast of Sumatra, which had by then assumed a near-mythical status as the newfound land of plenty. From 1800 to 1830 the Sumatran-American trade route was plied by ships bearing cargoes of pepper for the American market, that would eventually end up on dinner tables across the country as rich and poor alike enjoyed the taste of *piper nigrum* and spun tall tales of exotic lands and piratical cutthroats hundreds of miles away. And then, one day, the story came true.

2.II Not so friendly after all: The attack on the American merchant vessel *Friendship*

> We have been a commercial people from the very germe [sic] of our existence; and we must ever remain so; and it is the dictate of common sense to protect this commerce.[5]
> – Jeremiah N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac

The *Friendship* was a 366-ton East Indiaman that was constructed at Portland and bought by the company of Nathaniel Silsbee, Dudley Pickman and Richard Stone in 1827. Earlier in 1797 another vessel bearing the same name had already made the journey to Sumatra, under the command of Captain J. Williams. Like many ships of her class, she was designed as a vessel for

5 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. i

trade, capable of making the long-haul journey from Salem all the way to Southeast Asia and back again.[6] In 1830 Charles Moses Endicott was given command of the vessel with the task of sailing to Sumatra in order to purchase as much pepper as the *Friendship* could carry, and bring the cargo safely back home.

Not much is known about the goings-on aboard the *Friendship* as she made her way to Southeast Asia. By February 1831 she sighted the coastline of Sumatra and proceeded northwards, heading to the coastal settlement of Kuala Batu.[7] On 7 February, Captain Endicott began negotiating with the locals and their transaction commenced. Endicott and several of his crew landed ashore as the locals began loading the pepper aboard the vessel, but first mate Charles Knight proved heedless. More and more locals began boarding the ship, and according to the accounts that were documented later at one point daggers were drawn and a *melee* ensued. The Sumatrans took over the ship, killing the first mate and two crew members in the process – John Davis and George Chester. Captain Endicott, who was at that point ashore and unable to do anything, was forced to flee the scene with the help of a friendly Malay named Po' Adam.

With the help of Po' Adam, Endicott managed to sail away to the south and eventually came in contact with other American vessels – the *James Monroe*, the *Palmer* and the *Governor*.[8] Another attempt was made to re-take the *Friendship*, and this time Captain Endicott – with the help of the crew of the *James Monroe* – was successful.[9] The Sumatrans were repulsed, and the *Friendship* was reclaimed; but by that stage it was clear that the mission was a failure. The *Friendship*'s cargo had been stolen, which included stores of opium valued at more than 30,000 dollars.[10] Having lost its first mate and several members of the crew, the *Friendship* sailed away from Kuala Batu and eventually made it back to Salem (on 16 July 1831), only to be greeted by disappointed company-men whose dreams of profit had turned to ashes.

News of the attack on the *Friendship* spread like wildfire among the business fraternity of Massachusetts, and there was public outrage: An

6 See Phillips.

7 Note that the place-name of Kuala Batu has several spellings: *Kuala Batu, Kuala Bate, Kuala Batee*. I have used 'Kuala Batu' throughout for consistency, though the common modern spelling seems to be Kuala Batee. Kuala Batu lay 3 degrees 44' north latitude and 96 degrees 56' east latitude on the island of Sumatra, and in the 1830s was a polity in its own right, quite independent of the larger and better-known kingdom of Aceh

8 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 98.

9 Ibid., p. 94.

10 Ibid., p. 93.

American merchant vessel had been attacked without provocation and American shipping was under threat. The media highlighted the fact that an unarmed American trading vessel had been boarded, its crew killed, and that the ship was momentarily captured by the Sumatrans.

The *Friendship* belonged to the company of Silsbee, Pickman and Stone, and here other domestic political and economic considerations came into play. Nathaniel Silsbee was one of the owners of the *Friendship* and also a senator. Robert Stone and Andrew Dunlop, who were joint owners of the ship, were on friendly terms with President Andrew Jackson, who on the subject of their ship being taken hostage by the Sumatrans took a line similar to that of Senator Silsbee, and insisted that the American government do something to protect American vessels abroad.[11] The companies of Salem were not to be trifled with, for as Booth has noted the city's merchants, 'operating within the larger white male political system, ruled the town like autocrats'.[12] And the fact that the matter was taken up with gusto by the opposition meant that the Democrats in Congress were put on the defensive, and that some sort of response was deemed necessary.

The Kuala Batu affair came at a bad time for President Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States (1829-1837).[13] The former soldier-turned-politician was already facing a myriad of allegations from importunate members of the opposition, and was facing an election campaign soon (in November 1832). The Democratic Party, of which he was one of the principal founders, was supportive of his efforts towards decentralization, but was worried about his prospects of getting re-elected for another term. Jackson had been a slave owner before he became President, and was known for his harsh treatment of runaway slaves.[14] But the 'hero of the Battle of

11 Ibid., p. 19.

12 Booth, pp. xi-xii.

13 Jackson was hardly an isolationist, but he did hold firmly to the notion of American particularism. He emphasized America's uniqueness in many ways: America's diplomats stopped wearing the ostentatious uniforms favoured by European ambassadors, and opted instead for the simpler black frock coat and tricorne hat (Herring, pp. 164-165). In his dealings with foreign nations Jackson was hard-nosed and often uncompromising: The Russians – through the Russian-American Company – attempted to establish trading outposts along the Alaskan coast, but were pushed back by American companies; and this convinced American politicians of the need for America to control the entire northern half of the American continent (Herring, pp. 151-152; see also: Bassett; Schlesinger).

14 Andrew Jackson owned more than a hundred slaves and he continued owning them during his presidency. At his death in 1845 there were around 150 slaves living at his estate, the Hermitage, in Nashville. Research done at the Department of History at Cornell University has unearthed one of the ads that Jackson placed in the media – in the *Tennessee Gazette* in October 1804 – where Jackson offered a reward of 50 dollars for the capture of a 'Mulatto Man Slave, about thirty years

New Orleans' was being mocked by his critics for not being able to stare down a bunch of Malays in the East Indies, and the business community were insisting that their losses be recovered while the press was harping on about freedom of trade and navigation. President Jackson was hardly a dove by any standards: Herring has noted that Jackson 'was less concerned with promoting republicanism abroad than with commanding respect for the United States. He readily embraced the global destiny of the rising nation. More than his predecessors, he sought to project US power into distant areas.'[15]

President Jackson realized that to undertake an action so far away in Southeast Asia – where there was yet no substantial American naval presence and where there were no ports under American control – was a risky enterprise. America had no alliances with any of the local polities there, and unlike the other European colonial powers that had built their own networks of communications and logistics (as the British had begun to do in India), the Americans would have to rely on their own devices and resources while so far away from home. Despite the advances in maritime travel and ship-building, a journey to Sumatra would take months, and it was not certain if the situation there would be any clearer by the time an American force arrived.

Ultimately a decision was made: Orders were issued to Commodore John Downes, captain of the 50-gun heavy frigate USS *Potomac*, to undertake the journey to Sumatra immediately.[16] On 9 August 1831 the *Potomac* was re-directed to its new objective and had just enough time to resupply.[17] On 19 August Commodore Downes sailed from New York, heading southwards along the coast of Brazil until the ship joined the Pacific Squadron. The objective of the *Potomac*'s mission was laid out plainly in the orders that were issued by Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Navy:

> Circumstances have occurred since the last instructions to you, which require a change in your route to the Pacific, and which may impose on you some new duties of a character highly delicate and important. A

old, six feet and an inch high' who had escaped from him. In addition to the reward Jackson also offered to pay 'ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred' (see Brown).

15 Herring, p. 165.

16 The USS *Potomac* was armed with 42 32-pounders and eight shell-firing guns.

17 Initially the USS *Potomac* was meant to convey Martin Van Buren, America's envoy to Britain, to London. This first set of orders were issued by the Naval department on 27 June 1831, but were later rescinded (Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 523-527).

> most wanton outrage was committed on the lives and property of certain American citizens at Quallah-Battoo, a place on the Western side of the island of Sumatra, on the 7th of February last. [...]
> You are therefore directed to repair at once to Sumatra, by the way of the Cape of Good Hope, touching on the voyage thither only at such places as the convenience and necessities of your vessel may render proper. On your arrival at Quallah-Battoo, you will obtain from intelligent shipmasters, supercargoes, and others, engaged in the American trade in that neighbourhood, such information that they may possess about the government there, the piratical character of the population, and the flagrant circumstances of the injury before mentioned. Should that information correspond to what is given to you, the President of the United States, in order that prompt redress may be obtained for these wrongs, or the guilty perpetrators made to feel that the flag of the Union is not to be insulted with impunity, directs you to proceed to demand of the Rajah, or other authorities at Quallah-Battoo, restitution of the property plundered, or indemnity therefor, as well as for the injury done to the vessel; satisfaction for any other depredations committed there on our commerce, and the immediate punishment of those concerned in the murder of the American citizens.[18]

The Naval Secretary's orders also noted that the captain and crew of the *Potomac* ought to conduct their affairs with caution and sensitivity, for:

> Great care must be taken to have such vessel conduct with caution, forbearance, and good faith towards the natives; to render any assistance to American citizens; to make as favourable an impression as possible on the population, of the justice and strength of our government.[19]

And so the *Potomac* set off, on its maiden voyage to the East Indies. On board the vessel were more than 500 officers, sailors and marines. From the North American coast she sailed south to Brazil and then turned east, heading towards South Africa before traversing the Indian Ocean towards Sumatra. What lay ahead was an encounter that would later be called the First Sumatran Expedition by the US Navy, and America's first gunboat action in Southeast Asia.

18 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 528-529.
19 Ibid., p. 529.

2.III 'You are authorized to vindicate our wrongs': America's first attack in Southeast Asia

> Our flag should be borne to every portion of the globe, to give to civilized and savage man a just impression of the power we possess, and what manner we can exercise it when justice demands reparation for insulted dignity.[20]
> – Jeremiah N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac

Commodore Downes had been counselled by the Secretary of the Navy to exercise forbearance in his dealings with the people of Sumatra, but he had also been ordered to ensure 'the immediate punishment of those concerned in the murder of the American citizens'. Just how these two objectives were to be met at the same time was unclear. With nothing to guide his actions, Downes sought whatever information he could get about the inhabitants of Kuala Batu. While in South Africa he turned to the British for further intelligence about the place, though British opinion of Sumatra and its people at that time was disparaging to say the least. Reynolds noted that:

> [Downes] obtained such intelligence as left no doubt on his mind of the piratical character of the Quallah-Battooans, and the probably necessity of strong measures in procuring indemnification for the outrages committed on the *Friendship*. He was also assured at the Cape, by British forces in high command, of both the army and navy officers; too, who had themselves been much in India, and among the islands, and on the pepper coast, that the natives against whom he was sent to act were by no means to be despised as enemies; that they were notorious in their treachery; and, in their own manner of fighting, were not at all deficient in courage. Thus furnished and armed with all the necessary knowledge for conducting this untried enterprise, the Commodore felt anxious to reach the spot, and settle the account at once – peaceably if he could – forcibly if necessary.[21]

That Downes had 'no doubt on his mind of the piratical character' of the Sumatrans after consulting the British in Cape Town is telling in so many ways. Here was an American commander heading out to the East Indies to undertake an 'untried enterprise' with scant knowledge of the place he

20 Ibid., p. iii.
21 Ibid., pp. 95-96.

was about to visit and the people he was meant to chastise. That the British had a low opinion of Sumatrans in general is something that was already well known by then, for they had written off Sumatra as a den of pirates and cannibals ages ago.[22] Earlier expeditions attempted by the British had led to clashes, and they had retaliated with counter-attacks of their own.[23] Downes had formed his opinion of the people of Kuala Batu even before he arrived at the place, and that he could so readily agree with the opinions of British officers who had themselves been engaged in conflict with native communities in Africa, India and Burma points to the ease with which the echo chamber was built.

Though Downes' defenders would later insist that the Commodore was prepared to engage in dialogue with the ruler and people of Kuala Batu, the fact is that on the final leg of their journey to Sumatra – as the *Potomac* sailed across the Indian Ocean – preparations were being made for *war*: The crew were divided into divisions of 60, each led by a lieutenant.[24] The marines came under the command of their own officers, and plans were made for a landing on the beach, as well as the possibility of an attack on the *Potomac*. The sailors and marines spent their days on deck, practising the use of their guns and firing volleys in line formation.[25] On 5 January 1832 the *Potomac* sighted the island of St Paul, and seven days after clearing Hog Island the frigate found herself at the anchorage of Kuala Batu.

The attack on Kuala Batu was done in stages, and employed a combination of guile and pluck. Commodore Downes had his ship disguised as a Dutch merchant vessel, with its guns pulled back behind the decks and all ports shut.[26] (Other accounts, including that by Warriner, stated that the *Potomac*

22 Noor, *Discursive Construction*, pp. 99-120.

23 In 1804 a British squadron consisting of a frigate, two sloops and a brig had bombarded the pepper-trading settlement of Meukek (Muckie), 25 miles from Kuala Batu, but that attack ended in failure as the British troops were later attacked on land (Warriner, *Cruise*, p. 94).

24 Warriner noted that the men of the *Potomac* was divided into divisions and armed differently: The first and second divisions were armed with muskets, while the third with pikes and pistols. The artillery-men were armed with cutlasses and pistols, as were the officers (Warriner, *Cruise*, p. 66).

25 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 97-99. From Rio onwards the crew busied themselves with work, but also some amusement: Warriner noted that the men formed their own 'thespian corps' and pooled money among themselves to buy props and costumes, and the quarterdeck of the *Potomac* was turned into a makeshift theatre (Warriner, *Cruise*, pp. 37-38).

26 Reynolds noted the changes to the ship thus: 'In order that the Malays may not comprehend the real designs and character of the Potomac, the stump topgallant masts were got up, the maindeck guns run in and ranged fore and aft, the half ports shut in, and the white streak so altered as to show only ten ports on the side. The frigate was thus made to assume the appearance

was disguised as a Danish merchant ship.[27]) Upon its final approach the *Potomac* met a number of locals from the settlement, and questioned them about the nature of the defences in the settlement. It was decided that the attack (on 6 February 1832) would employ a combination of troops as well as bombardment from sea. By this stage, it was clear that peaceful negotiation was no longer foremost in the mind of Commodore Downes and his lieutenants. Reynolds noted that:

> Voluntary justice on the part of the Malays, for the piratical act of which we complained, was not to be looked for and was entirely out of the question. *It was the act of a whole community, with at least the connivance of their rulers the Rajahs.* The only plan, therefore, that promised success in compelling them to do us justice, was that of securing the persons of some of their principal rajahs, and retaining them as hostages until the actual perpetrators of this atrocious act of piracy were brought to punishment, and ample restitution of property was made to the owners of the ship *Friendship*, and her unfortunate officers and crew.[28]

After an initial scouting of Kuala Batu, Downes and his fellow officers concluded that the only alternative was to attack when the adversary was ill-prepared. Aware that the settlement was large, and that there were many Sumatrans who were armed and prepared, it was decided that the attack would take place at dawn the following morning, before the people of Kuala Batu were ready.[29]

Just before the break of dawn a force of 282 American marines and bluejackets were landed to the north of the settlement, accompanied by some light guns. That the Americans were spoiling for a fight was evident from the accounts of the battle later – even those on sick leave demanded to be given the chance to take part in the assault.[30] (The men were told, however, not to fire unless fired upon first.) The attack commenced upon

of a merchant ship of great burden and capacity, like many of the East India traders' (Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 104).

27 According to Warriner's account of the attack, the *Potomac* hoisted the Danish flag (*Cruise*, p. 77) and before the attack a small party was landed ashore to gauge the readiness of the Sumatrans. When asked what the ship was carrying, the officers informed the locals that they were loaded with opium (p. 78).

28 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 104-105. Emphasis mine.

29 It was estimated that there were around 2,000 inhabitants of Kuala Batu, of whom 500 were thought to be combatants.

30 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 106.

landfall, led by Lieutenants Shubrick, Hoff, Edson and Terrett, with the landing parties attacking the forts that were closest to the shore, leading to the loss of an estimated 150 Sumatrans killed in the fighting.

The Sumatrans were overwhelmed by the *Potomac*'s guns, and they then retreated to the fifth fort that was deeper inland, while the Americans then attacked the settlement itself, setting fire to houses and boats. As the fighting intensified, a further 300 Sumatrans were said to have been killed or wounded in the combat, and by mid-day the settlement had surrendered to the Americans.[31] The local chiefs had by then fled the scene; but the rest of the population were forced to desist in their resistance and the Americans decided to dismantle whatever was left of the defensive structures of the settlement. The *Potomac*'s losses were comparatively small, with only two soldiers killed and around half a dozen wounded, though none critically so.

As gunboat actions go, the attack on Kuala Batu was a hurried affair. The *Potomac* did not tarry long, and soon after upped anchor and proceeded along the coast until it reached the settlement of Soo-Soo, where the officers of the ship met up with Po' Adam, the friendly Sumatran chief who had helped rescue Captain Endicott of the *Friendship* years earlier. There they were met by a delegation from Kuala Batu who had come to offer their submission,[32] and it was there that Downes came to learn more about the relations between the kingdom of Aceh and the smaller polities along the Sumatran coast.

Commodore Downes' 'untried enterprise' had culminated in America's first gunboat action in Southeast Asia. Kuala Batu had been put to the torch, its forts and batteries destroyed, and several hundred were dead by the end of the fighting. Bloody though the encounter was the human cost was borne almost entirely by the Sumatrans. But the Kuala Batu attack was paltry in comparison to the battles that the Dutch and the British East India Company had fought in India, Burma, Borneo and Java – where the casualties mounted to thousands killed and displaced. Having achieved their objective, Downes ordered the frigate to set a course for home; though he and the men of the USS *Potomac* probably had no idea of the reception they were about to receive.

31 The first reports on the Kuala Batu incident that reached the United States were vague in the numbers of Sumatran killed or wounded in the fighting. Some of first reports cited the figure of a 'hundred or so' Sumatrans killed, while others spoke of 'many casualties'. The figure of around 450 casualties was given in Reynolds, *Voyage*.

32 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 123-124.

2.IV Drama awaits: The controversy over the Kuala Batu affair back home in America

> The President regrets that you were not able, before attacking the Malays at Quallah-Battoo, to obtain there, or near, fuller information of the particulars of their outrage.[33]
> – Levi Woodbury, Secretary for the US Navy, letter to Commodore Downes, 16 July 1833

Following the attack on Kuala Batu, the USS *Potomac* made its return journey back home to America. From Sumatra she sailed south to the Sunda Straits, passed the island of Krakatoa, skirted Banten (which Reynolds noted was no longer a prosperous native port, thanks to the monopoly of the Dutch East Indies company[34]), stopped at Batavia for 21 days (where both Reynolds and Warriner recorded the number of ships that had arrived and set off, to and from Dutch-controlled Java and remarked on the enormous volume of trade that was happening there[35]), proceeded to Macao, and then to Canton, after which she sailed to the Sandwich Islands and then to Tahiti, crossed the Pacific to Valparaiso (where it picked up the writer Jeremiah Reynolds), then to Lima, on to the Galapagos islands and then to Rio, before finally heading northwards to home. Reynolds noted the importance of the Pacific Ocean and the need for an American naval presence there:

> Every-thing conspires to render the Pacific a place of great interest to the people of the United States at the present time. *Our future sea-fights are likely to take place here* as on the Atlantic Ocean; for where we are acquiring a preponderating commercial interest, *there must be a navy too*. Such is the extent of the importance of the Pacific station – a station

33 Quoted in ibid., pp. 116-117.

34 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 251.

35 By Reynolds' count the number of ships that came and left Batavia during the time he was there was impressive. He counted the number of vessels of different Western nations and noted the figures thus: Dutch: 58 out, 54 home; English: 28 out, 27 home; American: 29 out, 29 home; French: 2 out, 1 home; Hamburg: 2 out, 1 home; Russian: 1 out; Swedish: 1 out; Danish: 1 home (*Voyage*, p. 265). By Reynolds' count, American ships were as active as British ships coming in and out of Batavia, second only to the Dutch, and far greater than the French, Germans, Swedish, Danish and Russians. Warriner noted that from Soo-Soo to Batavia the *Potomac* came in contact with at least two American commercial vessels: The Boston-registered brig *Olive*, which was trading in pepper, and the Philadelphia-bound *Philip First* (pp. 120-121, 134).

> which cannot be well protected with a less force than one frigate, two sloops-of-war, and a schooner.[36]

Finally on 22 May 1834 the *Potomac* reached the port of Boston, and by the end of her tour around the world had sailed a total of 61,000 miles, having spent 514 days at sea.[37] Festivities were held on the deck after her arrival, and the captain and crew were elated by the results of their mission. Reynolds closes his account in a somewhat theatrical manner, noting that 'and thus the curtain fell, on this scene of new and elegant festivity'[38] – but in fact the drama had just begun.

The contemporary reader may be surprised to learn of how fast news of the Kuala Batu attack travelled around the world, and reached America even before the *Potomac* had returned. Both Reynolds and Warriner noted that by the time the frigate reached the port of Batavia in Java news of the attack had already reached the residents of that city, and the small community of American merchants there were elated to hear the news.[39] As the *Potomac* continued along its journey back to Boston, other ships bore the news ahead of it, and in a matter of weeks the American press were already reporting the event.

On 7 July 1832, the *New-York Observer* ran one of the first reports of the action at Kuala Batu. The *New-York Observer* was an abolitionist, anti-slavery newspaper based in New York and it was a broadsheet with a somewhat religious bent. Its first two pages were often dedicated to religious matters such as Christian missions abroad, the anti-slavery campaign, the abolitionist struggle, etc., while the last two pages were dedicated to worldly matters including politics (American and foreign) and economics. The 7 July issue featured a long report on the gunboat action taken by the *Potomac* at Kuala Batu and reads as follows:

> *War with the Malays of Sumatra*
> The United States' frigate *Potomac*, which was sent to Sumatra, some time since, to punish the Malays of Quallah Battoo, on the coast of that island, for their treachery and murder of several of the crew of the merchant ship the *Friendship*, arrived at the place of her destination on the 6th of February, disguised as a merchantman. Capt. Downes landed 300

36 Ibid., p. 436. Emphasis mine.
37 Ibid., p. 519.
38 Ibid., p. 521.
39 Reynolds, *Voyage*; Warriner, *Cruise*.

men about a mile above the town, in less than three hours carried three forts, and killed 80 to 100 natives, with the loss of two killed and several wounded. The following particulars are from a letter inserted to the *Evening Post* of Thursday:

United States frigate Potomac*, Bantine* [*Banten*] *Bay, East Indies*
After three weeks stay at Rio de Janeiro, we sailed for the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, at which place we arrived on the 7th of December, 1831. After a stay of one week there, we sailed for the island of Sumatra, East Indies. On the 5th of February [1832] we anchored off Quallah Battoo [the place where the crew of the American ship *Friendship*, of Salem, were murdered by the Malays]. We went in under Dutch colours, disguised as a merchantman, run in the main deck guns and shut the ports, the ports on the spar decks we concealed by throwing back our hammock cloth. Immediately after our arrival we manned our whale boat with several of our officers disguised as sailors; they went ashore under pretence of bargaining for pepper, and in order to reconnoitre and find out which would be the most advantageous method of assailing the forts; but as soon as the natives perceived our boats approaching the shore, upwards of one hundred of them came down to the beach, armed against the crew. As Lieutenant Shubrick, commander, discovered this hostile disposition of the natives, he deemed it prudent not to land.[40]

The attack was described in some detail:

Now for our attack – in the dead hour of midnight, the shrill pipes of the boatswain and his mates summoned the men to arms – we were all scattered on the decks awaiting the moment. The go-ashore party [of which Jim Willis was one, as Rugler, and George Edwards another] consisting of about three hundred stout-hearted fellows, were shortly in the boats alongside with their instruments of death, and determined on 'Death or Victory'. At the dawn of day, and ere the morning star had made its appearance, our brave fellows made it on the beach, in four divisions, about one mile above the town and its fortifications – the marines in front. They marched along the beach in military order, each division under the command of its respective officer. Not a sound was heard, save the rolling of the surf. As they entered the town, Lieut. Hoff, with his division, filed off to the left, to take possession of the fort set apart for him to assail. The marines had

40 'War with the Malays of Sumatra', *New-York Observer*, 7 July 1832, p. 3.

> scarcely got one hundred yards past him, when they heard the noise of our pioneers breaking open the gates of the first fort with their crowbars and axes, which was immediately followed by a volley of musketry. As soon as they heard this, they knew that the affair was no longer a secret, and hurried to the second fort with all possible speed, to spare all the women and children. The marines entered the second fort at the charge of the bayonet, and put all to death, except three women, who supplicated for mercy.
> *There were several women killed who had the hardihood to take up arms when they saw their husbands fall at their feet; indeed it was impossible to distinguish the sex, they dress so much alike.*[41]

The *Observer*'s report made it clear that women *were* killed in the fighting, despite the order to spare women and children in the combat that ensued. But there is a vivid description of *one* woman in particular, whose conduct was presented in near-heroic terms:

> We lost two men in the conflict; one a marine named Benjamin T. Brown, shot through the heart; and one main-top man, William P. Smith, shot through the head. Both expired instantaneously. Daniel H. Cole, marine, shot through the body, and Henry Dutcher, mizzen-top man, shot through the thigh, both expected to recover. *You may remember – the man named John L. Dubois, ships corporal; he was wounded by a Malay woman in attacking the forts. This woman was with an Indian, probably her husband, who was attacked and killed by Dubois. As soon as she saw her husband fall, she had the courage to revenge him by attacking Dubois with a sabre; she cut him very badly between the upper joint of the thumb and where the wrist meets; the blow would have taken off the hand had it not been retarded by the barrel of the musket which was held at the time of a charge.* The number of enemy dead was estimated at from 80 to 100 killed, and a vast number wounded. The Rajah escaped, but the next in authority with a woman of the first order, were among the killed. It was fortunate that we attacked them in the morning, and when they so little expected us, otherwise I am of the opinion that few of our men would have returned on-board.[42]

Notwithstanding the apparent success of the *Potomac*'s attack on Kuala Batu, the news of the attack brought about a surprising change in American

41 Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis mine.
42 Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis mine.

public opinion. Following the publication of the news of the attack in the American press, several American newspapers began to raise questions about the conduct of the captain and crew of the warship. Unbeknownst to Commodore Downes and his men, back home in America they were being judged as 'savage murderers', and killers of women and children. Among the key questions that were raised then were:

Why did Commodore Downes not negotiate with the chiefs of Kuala Batu first, and find a peaceful way to seek reparation for the damages caused to the *Friendship*? (This was, in fact, the first question raised by Levi Woodbury, Secretary for the Navy, in his letter to Downes as well.[43]) None of the newspaper reports then mentioned any attempt by Downes to enter into peaceful discussion with the Sumatrans, or trying to ascertain what had actually happened to the crew of the *Friendship* that was attacked the year earlier.

Why was the attack carried out before dawn, when it was assumed that the people of Kuala Batu were asleep, and thus unprepared to defend themselves? (The *Observer*'s report on 7 July stated that preparations for the attack began at night, though the landing took place at the break of dawn.) The fact that the newspapers had reported that the *Potomac* had been disguised as a foreign merchant vessel and that preparations for the attack were made at night only added to the speculation among the critics that the assault on Kuala Batu may have employed more guile than courage, and was thus seen as cowardly.

And why did the commanding officer allow native women and children to be killed; and how could the killing of women ever be justified, even as an act of reprisal against piracy? The *Observer*'s report noted that the order was given not to harm any women or children, but later on in the same report it was noted that several women were indeed killed in the fighting. (The report noted that in such a 'fog of war' situation it was impossible to distinguish between male or female combatants: for 'indeed it was impossible to distinguish the sex, they dress so much alike'.[44])

The *New-York Observer* wasn't the only newspaper to report and discuss the Kuala Batu incident, and soon sensational news of the attack began to dominate the pages of newspapers from Boston to Washington. Several newspapers and columnists had taken a decidedly hostile stand on the matter, declaring that the attack on Kuala Batu was cowardly and an instance

43 Levi Woodbury, letter to Commodore Downes, Department of the United States Navy, 16 July 1833. Quoted in Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 116-117.

44 'War with the Malays of Sumatra', *New-York Observer*, 7 July 1832.

of excessive force used against ill-prepared belligerents who were unable to defend themselves. Compounding matters was the number of Sumatran civilian casualties, while American casualties amounted to only two dead. Rumours began to circulate of American sailors and soldiers engaging in widespread slaughter and plunder before the very eyes of their commander. Some columnists opined at length that the entire debacle could have been avoided if the captain of the *Potomac* had parleyed with the Sumatrans instead. At least one columnist of a Boston newspaper argued that 'with a launch's crew, and a few marines, he could surround the town, and dictate his own terms, without the shedding of a drop of blood'.[45]

By late 1832, the Kuala Batu affair had been debated by the American press, with newspapers taking opposite sides on the matter. Instead of being valorized as heroes and defenders of national interest, Commodore Downes and his men were vilified in some quarters as 'vain boasters, plunderers and savage murderers of women and children'.[46] The expedition to the East Indies appeared to be tottering on the verge of a monumental public relations disaster. For more than a year, several newspapers took their respective stands on the issue, as commentary over the incident grew ever more partisan and divisive. As late as 1833 – one year after the Kuala Batu attack and two years after the attack on the *Friendship* – various broadsheets across America were still harping on the matter and not allowing it to rest.

In July 1833, it was the turn of the *National Intelligencer* to jump into the fray, with yet another lengthy column-cum-editorial that rallied to the defence of Commodore Downes and the crew of the *Potomac*. The *National Intelligencer* was, between the 1810s and 1860s, the most popular and widely-read newspaper in Washington.[47] On Wednesday 17 July 1833, the *Intelligencer* carried a long report on the Kuala Batu incident, and came out openly in support of Commodore Downes. The report read thus:

> *Com. Downes and the Frigate* Potomac
> We publish, from the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, a statement by a correspondent of the '*affair of Quallah Battoo*', under the direction of Com. Downes, of the Frigate *Potomac*.
> It rejoices us to assist in circulating a defence of this gallant officer, and in recording the spirit and enterprise of his noble crew. We regretted

45 *National Intelligencer*, Washington, DC, 17 July 1833.

46 Quoted in: *National Intelligencer*, Washington, DC, 17 July 1833.

47 Founded by Samuel Harrison Smith, Joseph Gales and William Winston Seaton, the *National Intelligencer* was partisan in its support for the opposition in Congress.

> the attacks that have been made on Commodore Downes, for his alleged conduct towards the natives in this affair. We know this officer too well to believe him capable of any act that does not comport with his own, or his country's honor. *Our gallant officers glory more in humanity to a foe, than to a triumph.* It was this feeling that won their fadeless laurels in the late war. We never believed that Com. Downes had given any order, or sanctioned any act, that would deprive him of that enviable satisfaction which the humane conqueror only can feel. Everybody will be satisfied with the following statement of the case.[48]

That the *Intelligencer* was keen to defend the *humanity* of Commodore Downes and the men of the *Potomac* was a direct response to the charges of *inhumanity* that that had been levelled against them by the other newspapers of the time. With the American press divided over the issue, the *Intelligencer* turned to other like-minded columnists and newspapers for support. The report from the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, which was reproduced in full by the *Intelligencer*, reads as follows:

> By a late arrival we have received a number of papers, and I am sorry to see the abuse that has been heaped upon Commodore Downes and his officers, respecting the affair of Quallah Battoo. They have, while being absent from their country and unable to defend themselves, been held up to the censure of their countrymen, and the indignation of the world, as '*vain boasters, plunderers and savage murderers of women and children*.'
> I have been informed by an eye witness, an actor in the scene, that the particulars contained in the official return are all strictly true; that there is not a vain boast in the letter; that it was a most perilous enterprise; and would have been attended with the most disastrous results, had there been the slightest want of firmness or prudence.
> A great deal has been said about the number that were killed; and an attempt has been made to impress the public mind with the belief that they were murdered in the dead of night, naked and unarmed. Many, it is true, were killed, in open day and with arms in their hands.
> The officers engaged in the operation were no doubt as deeply impressed with the sacred character of humanity, and are as much under its benign influence as those who have raised such an outcry against them. They were placed, however, in a critical situation; they had two alternatives

48 'Com. Downes and the Frigate *Potomac*', *National Intelligencer*, 17 July 1833, p. 3. Emphasis in the original.

> to choose between – to kill their opponents or be killed themselves. They chose the first, and so would any one save a madman. They were not quite so quixotic as to be killed rather than to defend themselves.[49]

The newspaper then goes on to defend the captain and crew of the *Potomac* against the accusation of slaughter and theft, which was one of the more damaging accusations that were levelled against Commodore Downes and his crew:

> If a sordid passion for plunder had placed them in this situation, then humanity might have entertained a doubt as to the propriety of defending themselves at the expense of the attacking party. But their sordid passions did not place them in this perilous position. They were ordered there in the execution of their duty – a painful and dangerous duty, it is true – but not the less imperative on that account. I have understood their government ordered them to land and surround the forts and town, and demand restitution of the property plundered from one of their ships, and the punishment of the murderers. They did so, and mark the result: The first fort that was approached and surrounded for this purpose, opened its fire upon the officer and his men, while he was making his demand, in as intelligent a manner as his imperfect knowledge of their language would permit.[50]

The most damaging accusation against the men of the Potomac was the claim that they had killed women and children who were unarmed and defenceless. The *Intelligencer* was particularly keen to defend Commodore Downes and his men on that point, and emphasized the following:

> It is my candid belief, from what I have heard from various sources, that not one woman was killed, knowing her to be as such. One, however, was wounded, but it was done in disarming her after she had fired a ball through the hat of one of the men, wounded him in the head with a javelin, and almost cut his thumb off with a sabre. This is proof of their being of a *mild, inoffensive race of people, like the Otaheitans, more sinned against than sinning*.[51]

Though the *Intelligencer*'s columnist insisted that *no women* were killed in the combat, the claim was disputed by the testimonies of other participants

49 Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis in the original.
50 Ibid., p. 3.
51 Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis in the original.

and witnesses to the event, who noted that women were indeed slain.[52] The *Intelligencer*'s report went on to great lengths to salvage the reputation of Commodore Downes and his men – the word '*humanity*' appears six times in the report, and '*gallantry*' five; and it concluded with the appeal that 'the above facts, which may be relied on, will be sufficient to correct the erroneous statements that have been made, and the false conclusions drawn therefrom in many of the papers of the United States.'[53]

But America was already a post-factual society then, long before the term became trendy as it has become today; and newspapers like the *New-York Observer*, the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, the *National Intelligencer*, the *Evening Post*, et al. were all in the business of news, as well as the business of politics. That America's press was by then divided along party-political lines was a reflection of the kind of political culture that had developed in the country – George Washington's dream of creating a non-partisan democratic republic was long forgotten by that point. And for those who were opposed to President Jackson and the Democratic Party, the attack by the USS *Potomac* – whose mission he had authorized – was a convenient way to chip at the reputation of Jackson and his administration too. A furore erupted in Congress, and the House of Representatives submitted a motion – that went uncontested – demanding that President Jackson make public the original orders that were given to Commodore Downes, and prove that the American government had not ordered the attack on the Sumatran settlement thousands of miles away.[54]

Herring has noted that America's foreign policy and its dealings with other states and peoples was almost always held hostage by its domestic politics, as foreign policy was 'often the object of fierce partisan dispute'.[55] The manner in which the Kuala Batu affair was turned into a political football by National Republicans and Democrats alike demonstrated the extent to which America's interventions abroad were determined by political contestation at home. With a domestic press that was partisan there was no way to settle the dispute, but there were still those who wished to set the record straight. Some kind of settlement would come one year later, with the publication of two works that appeared in the wake of the Kuala Batu

52 The *New-York Observer's* report on 7 July 1832, for instance, noted that: 'There were several women killed who had the hardihood to take up arms when they saw their husbands fall at their feet; indeed it was impossible to distinguish the sex, they dress so much alike (*New-York Observer*, New York, 7 July 1832, p. 3).

53 'Com. Downes and the Frigate Potomac', *National Intelligencer*, 17 July 1833, p. 3

54 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. vi-vii.

55 Herring, p. 7.

controversy; and both of them were written by men who had been part of the expedition: Francis Warriner's *Cruise of the United States Frigate* Potomac; and Jeremiah N. Reynolds' *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac.

Francis Warriner was part of the expedition from the very beginning, and he was ordered to report to the USS *Potomac* in July 1831.[56] Jeremiah Reynolds was already well known to the Department of the Navy, and his interest in the Pacific was a long and abiding one: In 1828 he had presented to the House of Representatives a detailed report on the Pacific Ocean and South Seas, which argued for an expedition across the Pacific by the American Navy.[57] Both men would write their own accounts of the First Sumatran Expedition of 1832-1834, and both accounts purported to be as comprehensive as they could be. Both of their narratives are strikingly similar, and yet different in some important ways. And in the manner that both of them had tried to recount, explain and justify what happened at Kuala Batu their writings reveal a lot about how Americans saw themselves and their role in Asia at the time.

2.V 'Conducted in a desultory manner': Francis Warriner's account of the Kuala Batu attack

Director Krennic: *We're on the verge of greatness. We were this close to providing peace, security for the galaxy.*
Galen Erso: *You're confusing peace with terror.*
– *Star Wars: Rogue One*, dir. Gareth Edwards

Francis Warriner was placed among the officers of the USS *Potomac*, though as one of the 'non-combatants' on the frigate he was cut from a different cloth altogether.[58] His record of the cruise of the *Potomac* starts with how he was ordered to report for duty aboard the frigate even before the warship was directed to sail to Sumatra. It was a dry narrative that Warriner wrote, presented in a matter-of-fact way with little flourish and bombast, and perhaps not intended to enthuse the spirit of patriots back home. He set off from his 'beautiful village washed by the waters of the Connecticut' to New York where the *Potomac* was anchored, not knowing anyone aboard the vessel save for the Commodore himself.[59]

56 Warriner, *Cruise*, p. 2.
57 See Reynolds, 'Information'.
58 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 110, 130.
59 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

The most obvious difference between the narratives of Warriner and Reynolds is how the former was more religious in tone.[60] Though he wore a mariner's uniform – the buttons of which were sometimes traded with the natives of Sumatra – Warriner saw the hand of God everywhere around him, even in the sharks and dolphins; and marvelled at the wonders of the natural world.[61] From the beginning to the end of his narrative, God was present as the omniscient witness throughout; and not surprisingly he also ended his work by thanking God for bringing him and the men of the *Potomac* safely back home.[62] But although Warriner sermonizes rather a lot throughout his account, he did not share the prejudices of the other Christians he met. While the *Potomac* was in Cape Town he wrote highly about the Africans whom he felt had been much maligned by Europeans, and in Cape Town's prison he interviewed a Malay prisoner who had been sentenced to death for murder, but who had since converted to Christianity and who 'appeared like a true penitent'.[63]

Earlier while the *Potomac* was anchored off the coast of Brazil Warriner had also lamented what he witnessed there: In Rio he commented on the poor state of the slaves and prisoners he saw, who were 'filthy and dressed in rags'[64]; and he wrote about the evils of slavery, which he found repulsive to his moral sensibilities. (Though slavery was certainly not confined to Brazil at the time, and was still in practice back home in America, too.) The moral degradation that he saw in the natives of Brazil and South Africa were, for him, symptoms of a brutally exploitative system that he regarded as unethical and un-Christian; and on several occasions in his work he criticized the greed of Western companies and governments that were willing to turn a blind eye to such injustice for the sake of profit.

The moral tone that Warriner took in his work was most pronounced in his account of the attack on Kuala Batu – in Chapters 6 and 7[65] – which are really the centrepiece of his book. In the first few chapters of his work Warriner wrote about the mercy of God and the bounties of nature, and bemoaned man's inhumanity to man. He had condemned slavery and the exploitation of the weak and the poor, and found succour in scripture instead. But as the *Potomac* approached its target it was evident that blood would soon be

60 Warriner, *History*, p. 140.

61 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 35-36.

62 Warriner ended his work by writing that 'My heart rose in grateful aspirations to the God of the universe, for his kindness and tender mercies' (*Cruise*, p. 366).

63 Ibid., p. 62.

64 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

65 Ibid., pp. 75-85, 86-99.

spilt, and he was at pains to justify what was about to happen. He reasoned that though the Malays of Sumatra were 'bold navigators', they possessed 'a treacherous, vindictive character', and that they had after all murdered Americans who had come to trade.[66] Though he was himself convinced of the necessity for reprisal, his description of the Kuala Batu attack was less effusive. Of the settlement of Kuala Batu itself he was not overly impressed, and he noted that it was hardly an impregnable fortress by any standard:

> The town was defended by several forts, built more in reference to the system of intestine warfare among the native tribes of the islands, with which they were in open and constant hostility, than to any regular plan of modern military defence.[67]

Warriner admitted that he was among the non-combatants who did not take part in the hand-to-hand combat that took place in the town, though he was not the only one: Commodore Downes did not take part in the assault either, but observed from the starboard gangway of the frigate.[68] Nonetheless, he observed the action closely and what seems to have troubled Warriner the most was the fact that Sumatran women and children were involved in the fighting that took place there, and how the killing of women could ever be justified. At one point he explains the killing of female combatants as an instance of military necessity and one of the sad realities of war, for:

> The sword of war should ever distinguish between the armed and the unarmed, but if women openly jeopardise their lives in the forefront of battle, can it be expected that they will escape unharmed?[69]

And later he describes in detail how one of the women of Kuala Batu was bayoneted by an American soldier in the heat of battle:

> A seaman had just scaled one of the ramparts, when he was severely wounded by a blow received from a weapon in her hands. But her own life paid the forfeit of her daring, for she was immediately transfixed by a bayonet in the hands of the individual who she had so severely injured.[70]

66 Ibid., p. 77.
67 Ibid., p. 76.
68 Ibid., p. 84.
69 Ibid., p. 89.
70 Ibid., p. 89.

But as his account of the battle continued, Warriner was unable to disguise the fact that the attack had soon turned into an all-out slaughter, as men, women and children were shot and cut down indiscriminately:

> The engagement had now become general, and the alarm universal. Men, women and children were seen flying in every direction, carrying the few articles they were able to seize in the moment of peril, and some of the men were cut down in their flight. Several of the enemy's prows, filled with people, were severely raked by brisk fire from the six pounder, as they were sailing up the river to the south of the town, and a number of natives were killed.[71]

Honest as it was, Warriner's account revealed in stark terms what the actual combat at Kuala Batu was like; and how the punitive action that the *Potomac* was meant to perform soon degenerated into indiscriminate killing and wholesale plunder:

> The warfare on shore, it would seem, *was conducted in a desultory manner*. The marines preserved perfect order, but it was with difficulty that the sailors could be kept in their ranks. The latter were much excited, and cared but little about death. Many of the natives were shot down in their houses, from which they were firing upon our men. *Old – on being questioned while about to kill a woman, replied 'it matters not, for if there were no women, there would be no Malays.' Many of the men came off richly laden with spoils which they had taken from the enemy*, such as Rajah's scarfs and shawls, *creeses* richly hilted and with gold scabbards, gold and silver *chunam* boxes, chains, earrings, and finger-rings, anklets and bracelets, and a variety of other ornaments. *Money to a considerable amount was brought off; this was chiefly in pice, several bags of which were taken, but a few enriched themselves with quantities of gold and silver coin. Among the spoils were a Chinese gong, a Koran, taken from Mahomet's fort, and several pieces of rich gold cloth*. Some of the sailors had promised themselves a rich repast upon fowls and ducks they had secured, but being called to repair on board sooner than they expected, were compelled to leave them behind.[72]

The attack had been a success, but at a considerable human cost to the people of Kuala Batu. Warriner noted that by the end of it 'the greater part

71 Ibid., p. 90.

72 Ibid., pp. 97-98. Emphasis mine.

of the town was reduced to ashes'.[73] In less than two hours Kuala Batu had been burned down, and 'the triumph had now been completed upon the Malays; ample satisfaction had been taken for their outrages committed upon our countrymen, and the bugle sounded the return of the ship's forces; and the embarkation soon after was effected'.[74] The assault was done in haste, with the intention of providing a demonstration of force and violence in no uncertain terms; but for the Godly Warriner this was not a moral victory by any means. Later he noted that the Sumatrans were totally out-gunned by the Americans, and overwhelmed by the latter's firepower: The local gunpowder was of poor quality, and later the Americans realized that the Sumatran muskets were loaded not with lead balls, but pieces of wood.[75]

Though Warriner accepted the argument that the Sumatrans of Kuala Batu deserved to be punished for the attack on the *Friendship* earlier, he also raised the question of America's own earlier conduct with the people of Sumatra, and noted that:

> There is, however, another consideration that should not be forgotten. If, in former times, our own country-men, going as they did, from a Christian country, hallowed by its Sabbaths, had always manifested an open, upright, and honest conduct, in their intercourse with the inhabitants of Sumatra, the President of the United States would never have been obliged to dispatch a frigate of war, on such an expedition as the one above described.[76]

Though he did not lay blame on the conduct of the captain and crew of the *Friendship* in any way, Warriner maintained that:

> Over the whole subject of our intercourse with the inhabitants of the island, there hangs a *tale of woe*, which has never been unravelled. *The natives were robbed and cheated in by-gone days. Even-handed justice was not dealt out to them*, and this course was pursued, for what? For paltry gain, for the gratification of avarice. Hence, in connection with such conduct, the innocent must suffer with the guilty.[77]

73 Ibid., p. 91.
74 Ibid., p. 92.
75 Ibid., p. 95.
76 Ibid., p. 97.
77 Ibid., pp. 97-98. Emphasis mine.

As much as he deplored piracy and believed that it should never be allowed to go unpunished, the ever-pious Warriner was not about to condone the killing and looting that took place at Kuala Batu by his fellow Americans 'for the gratification of avarice'. The moral universe of Warriner's narrative was one where sin begot sin, and where the righting of wrongs was not to be done through wanton slaughter. Sanctimonious though the tone of his work was, it did capture the moral haziness that surrounded the Kuala Batu affair; and it did admit to the fact that American troops had killed native women – '*for if there were no women, there would be no Malays*', as one of them declared before he delivered the fatal blow. This was an account that left no doubt that killing and looting had taken place, and the author's judgement of such behaviour was equally clear.

Following the attack on Kuala Batu the *Potomac* then proceeded to Soo-Soo and made its way to Batavia before it began the long journey home across the Pacific. With the smoke and noise of the Kuala Batu attack behind him, Warriner's narrative slowly returned to the themes he favoured most: the glories of God and the beauty of nature. In Dutch-administered Batavia he was allowed to go ashore and interact with other Westerners, and it is telling that he – like many other Americans who would venture to Southeast Asia in the decades to come – found comfort in the company of fellow Americans and Englishmen above all. He delighted in the company of missionaries in particular, such as the American missionary Reverend Abeel[78] and the Englishman Reverend Medhurst (an Episcopalian of the London Missionary Society) – 'a man of ardent piety' – and Mr. Keasberry and Mr. Young.[79]

With the passing of time Warriner's attention was diverted to the Dutch colonial administration in Java and its impact on the communities there. He lamented the fact that the Dutch colonial authorities seemed more interested in profit and less in spreading the word of God. The Dutch were not, in his opinion, truly keen to see the spread of Christianity across the archipelago and had done little to help the missionaries (including American missionaries like Rev. Abeel) who had ventured to their colony.[80] Worse still was the sort of company they kept, and the somewhat loose and lax moral standards that were being maintained among the Westerners resident in Batavia then; for Warriner came to the conclusion that Rev. Medhurst and his wife 'were the solitary lights in this region of darkness'; while other

78 Ibid., p. 147.
79 Ibid. 145-146.
80 Ibid., p. 178.

Europeans were less discriminating in their choice of friends and partners in bed.[81]

Of the other Asians he saw and met in Batavia, Warriner even less flattering. The Chinese, in his eyes, were inclined mainly to gambling and other vices, and were disinclined towards Christianity.[82] He did make several attempts to visit the few Chinese temples in Batavia, and observe some of the rites and rituals that were performed there, but Chinese rituals were for him 'discordant and deafening', little more than 'gross idolatry'.[83] However Warriner was not alone in his negative opinion of Chinese beliefs and culture, as we shall see in the following chapters. He, and many Americans of his generation, believed that 'the genius of Christianity' would 'offer light and knowledge to the meanest and most ignorant subject within the wide range of human wo [sic]',[84] and on several occasions in his work expressed a clear inclination to seek, and remain, in the company of fellow Christians with whom he was most comfortable with.[85]

What did set Warriner apart from his fellow countrymen and other Europeans was his ability to maintain some degree of objective balance in his accounting of events. Though he had bluntly stated that the Malays of Sumatra were 'treacherous' and 'vindictive', and had offered some justification for the killings that took place at Kuala Batu, he was nonetheless able to appreciate the fact that the faith and religiosity of the Malays was sincere and real: Shortly after the *Potomac* had moved on from Kuala Batu to Soo-Soo, some Malays had approached the Americans and offered them a sum of a hundred dollars to regain the Quran that the Americans had stolen from Kuala Batu earlier. Warriner was struck by this, and noted:

> The Mohammedans are more firmly attached to the rites of their religion than we are to ours, and they often rigidly observe the precepts of the Koran, than Christians do of the Bible. [...] *Who is there in our country who would give a hundred dollars for a Bible?* Yet the Mohammedans

81 Ibid. P. 170.

82 Ibid., p. 158.

83 Ibid., pp. 163-165, 166.

84 Ibid., p. 166.

85 Though Warriner's writing was less derisive in its treatment of Asians in general, he did reveal his preference to seek company among the known and the familiar. In the latter part of his narrative Warriner recounted the visit of the USS *Potomac* to Macao, and the very first thing that Warriner did when the frigate had dropped anchor was to seek the company of the missionary Mister Bridgeman (*Cruise*, p. 197). Warriner clearly found comfort in the company of another like-minded Christian, and noted that Bridgeman 'was the only person known to me among the three hundred millions of the Chinese empire' (*Cruise*, p. 201).

> offered this sum for a Koran, which we had captured at one of the forts at Quallah-Battoo.[86]

Notwithstanding his moralizing, Francis Warriner's final judgement of the First Sumatran Expedition was as complex as the narrative he had woven. Though he defended the political necessity for armed retribution, he also abided by a higher moral law that saw murder and theft as wrong, regardless of who did it. He abhorred the customs and beliefs of Asians whom he regarded as backward and superstitious, but could not deny – and did not deny – that his fellow countrymen were just as able to indulge in murder and theft, as he duly recorded in his work. The moral stand that he took – and maintained throughout the journey – placed him in a difficult position at times during the Sumatran Expedition, and though he was not one to engage in gossip and tattle he did allude to the fact that some of the officers and crew found his presence an uncomfortable one: On the second leg of the journey home back to America Warriner expressed his wish to start a Bible study class on board the *Potomac*, but noted that the initial response was a cool one, and that 'unfavourable opinions' were expressed by some of the men.[87]

Though he had been ordered to take part in the expedition, Warriner's moral standing placed him at times in the grey zone between his fellow Americans and the native Southeast Asians they were shooting at. Such hazy boundaries are nowhere to be seen in the work of another writer whose account of the *Potomac*'s expedition would introduce a clearer distinction between Americans and Others, friends and enemies: Jeremiah Reynolds.

2.VI 'We have made no conquests, dethroned no Sultans': Jeremiah Reynolds' defence of American aggression

> Nothing should be left undone to leave an indelible impression upon the minds of these people, of the power of the United States to inflict punishments for aggressions committed upon her commerce, in seas however distant.[88]
>
> – Jeremiah N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac

The Pennsylvania-born Jeremiah Reynolds was a rather different kind of writer compared to the humble and retiring Warriner. A graduate of Ohio

86 Ibid., pp. 115-116. Emphasis in the original.
87 Ibid., pp. 251-252.
88 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 121.

University, he first made his mark in the public domain as the editor of the *Ohio Spectator*, before moving on to a life of research and exploration. In the early 1820s he was known as an advocate of the 'hollow earth' theory – which he later abandoned – and shortly after he turned his attention to the sea instead. The Pacific Ocean became his area of interest, and late in the year 1828 he submitted to the Navy Department the result of his research, entitled 'Information Collected by the Navy Department Relating to Islands, Reefs, Shoals, etc. in the Pacific Ocean and South Seas, and Showing the Expediency of an Exploring Expedition in that Ocean and Those Seas by the Navy'.[89]

Reynolds had joined the crew of the *Potomac* after he was picked up at Valparaiso, Chile; and his *Voyage of the United States Frigate* Potomac was another complex piece of writing. On the surface level it is a straightforward step-by-step account of the USS *Potomac*'s journey from America to Sumatra and back again; but it is clear that the centrepiece of the narrative was the attack on Kuala Batu, which was the cause of all the controversy that ensued in the wake of the mission. Reynolds' tone vacillates, as he heaps praise upon Commodore Downes and the conduct of the crew, to defending the action at Kuala Batu by providing justification for the assault that led to the burning of the settlement and the killing of so many of its inhabitants.

At one point in his account his conviction seems to waver, as he confesses to having some sympathy for the Sumatrans who were the targets of the *Potomac*'s guns:

> In one respect, we are not without our sympathy for the Malays. We know the wrongs they have suffered, in common with the other natives of India, and we may speak of these wrongs in another place; *but whatever injustice they may have received, it has not been from our hands. We have made no conquests, dethroned no Sultans; oppressed and enslaved no inhabitant of the Eastern world.* We have to do with the Malays as we find them, without stopping to enquire how they became so; or what, under more favourable circumstances, they might have been.[90]

It is clear that Reynolds is alluding to the realities of colonialism that was on the march across much of Asia then; and that he was aware of the human cost of empire-building by the European powers of the time. Yet though he expresses sympathy for the Malays of Sumatra as well as 'the other natives of India' who had come under Western colonial rule, he fails to connect

89 Reynolds, 'Information Collected'.

90 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 98. Emphasis mine.

the dots in his own narrative, and note that whatever intelligence that had been gathered by Commodore Downes about the Sumatrans of Kuala Batu – which convinced him that the Sumatran Malays were piratical to the core and deserving of violent reprisal – had been furnished by the very same British colonialists and imperialists of India and South Africa whom he interviewed earlier at Cape Town. Reynolds' own defence thus falls back on the argument that America was at least innocent of the sin of empire-building, and that it has 'made no conquests, dethroned no Sultans; oppressed and enslaved no inhabitant of the Eastern world'.

Reynolds' defence of the conduct of the *Potomac* may have stemmed from his belief that America, as a republic that was once a colony too, was disinclined towards collecting colonies wherever it went. That he could have held such a belief then is understandable, considering that he was a man of his time and was embedded in the present. Without the benefit of foresight Reynolds could not possibly have envisaged the path that America would take as the century wore on, and could not have imagined that kind of role America would later play in Southeast Asia by the end of the nineteenth century. But Reynolds only needed to look a little further beyond the horizon to see the workings of another republic – France – and observe how a nation that had shed the yoke of monarchical rule would later become a colonizing power. As Brocheaux and Hemery have shown, whatever republican values and virtues the French may have held at home in France were cast aside in their race for captive colonial markets abroad.[91] Notwithstanding the fact that there was no divine commandment or natural law which dictated that republics could not become empires themselves, Reynolds' argument reads as an appeal for American exceptionalism, and was guided by his belief that despite all appearances, America and Americans were different.

91 As Brocheux and Hemery note, 'French Cochinchina was a product of "naval imperialism", and for twenty years – from 1859 to 1879 – the navy alone ran it; and this was the so-called "era of the admirals", of whom eight would eventually govern the colony after the treaty of 1862. The Indochinese enterprise was, in fact, one of the important elements in creating a powerful fleet of warships with global range: the French navy opted for steamships in the great naval building programs of 1846-1851 and 1857, and by 1870 it possessed 339 warships, of which 45 were ironclads' (p. 21). France's colonization of Indochina was a complex process that sparked heated debates back in Paris, for it raised the critical question of legality and by what right did France have to conquer and colonize the territory of another nation. For republicans in France the very idea of the French republic becoming an imperial power was a contradiction in terms, for it undermined the principle of universal equality that was enshrined by the French revolution. But at the same time the demands of domestic economic interests dictated that the French economy also had to grow, and there was a need for the republic to gain access to foreign markets that would only be loyal to French manufacturers.

Again, the complexity of Reynolds' work has to be considered: This was no work of syrupy hagiography or chest-thumping nationalist propaganda. As the private secretary to Commodore Downes, Reynolds had taken upon himself the task of exonerating the commander and crew of the *Potomac* of wrong-doing, and was writing for a domestic audience back home in America, to persuade his fellow Americans of the necessity of the attack on Kuala Batu. To that end he also appealed to their sense of common American identity, and to put that American identity first when judging the actions of Americans towards non-Americans.

That Reynolds condoned the *Potomac*'s attack on the people of Kuala Batu is evident, but what is equally important to note is that he did not see any difference between attacks on Americans abroad and attacks on American settlers by Native Americans back home. For him, both were instances of attacks on Americans, and *any* attack on Americans – be it by Sumatrans in the East Indies or by 'the primitive proprietors of American soil' – could not go unpunished:

> When similar acts of aggression are perpetrated by the primitive proprietors of American soil – when a robbery or murder has been committed by one or more individuals of the tribe on our Western frontiers – the nearest local authority immediately makes a demand that the culprits be forthwith given up to abide by the penalties of our laws; and if refused, the demand is quickly enforced by the arm of military power. […] Ought the bloodthirsty inhabitants of Sumatra be treated with any more lenity than the much wronged and oppressed aborigines of our own country?[92]

Here, then, was the crux of Reynolds' defence: That the safeguarding of American lives, property and commerce was paramount, above and before all other considerations. The attack on Kuala Batu was justifiable in the same way that attacks on Native Americans were justified in the defence of American lives. When the *Friendship* was captured and its crew members killed, those were American lives lost and American property stolen, and in reprisal for such loses the attack on Kuala Batu was deemed both acceptable and necessary to demonstrate the fact that the American republic would be willing to use whatever force it had at its disposal to right whatever wrongs it has suffered. It was on the basis of this argument that Reynolds sought to turn American public opinion back to the side of Commodore Downes and his crew.

92 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 105.

But in the course of arguing so, Reynolds had also introduced a dichotomy that would capture and define America's relationship with the outside world as well: His world was one that was neatly divided into two mutually distinct categories, one that was populated only by Americans and Others. That he could compare the Sumatrans of Kuala Batu to the natives of America shows that the Other was, for Reynolds, everywhere – from the islands of Southeast Asia to the western frontiers of the American republic.

The *Asian Other* looms large in Reynolds' work; and he tended to see them in terms of stock generic types and as distinct nations, rather than as individuals. Earlier in his work he expressed sympathy for the Indians of the subcontinent, as he noted how the contestation between the European powers – notably Britain and France – had led to India's polities being destabilized one by one. Of the people of Sumatra – the knowledge of whom he derived from secondary sources – he was more dismissive, convinced as he was that piracy was the mainstay of many of them and that they were '*tout ensemble* degenerate'.[93] When writing about the customs of Kuala Batu he singled out their 'cruel forms of punishment' that were meted out to thieves and other criminals.[94] Though he found some Sumatrans 'mild and forbearing', he was prone to regard them all as dishonest and indolent.[95] In terms of their development Reynolds compared the Sumatran Malays to Eskimos and Laplanders.[96] He held similar views of the Bataks and the people of Minangkabau,[97] though here it ought to be noted that Reynolds' general observations were not the result of face-to-face contact or ground-level fieldwork, but rather based on his own selective readings or hearsay – exactly what the British merchant-explorer John Anderson had warned against, six years before the Americans' arrival in Sumatra.[98]

Following the account of the attack on Kuala Batu Reynolds' narrative follows the cruise of the *Potomac* as it made its way via the Sunda Strait towards Java. As in the work of Warriner, Reynolds' work also introduces a

93 Ibid., pp. 132-156, 160-162.

94 Ibid., p. 182.

95 Ibid., p. 162.

96 Ibid., pp. 145-146.

97 Ibid., pp. 180-182.

98 John Anderson's *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra* (1826) was written precisely to counter some of the biased observations among British merchants that were in circulation during his time. Anderson noted time and again in his own work that the talk about piracy (and cannibalism) among Sumatrans was wildly exaggerated, and that most of the Sumatran communities were in fact eager to engage in trade with foreign nations. See Noor, *Discursive Construction*, pp. 99-120.

typology of native types as he begins to write about the other Asian communities that resided in the archipelago then.

The Javanese were treated slightly better in Reynolds' narrative, as he regarded them as being wholly distinct from the Sumatrans. He found the Javanese amiable and noted that their physical appearance was different from the Sumatrans. Though he thought of them as a proud people overly 'fond of show and pomp',[99] he placed the blame for their decline upon the shoulders of the Europeans – and the Dutch in particular – who had corrupted this 'sober people' with the vices of alcohol and opium. Such a view of the Javanese as an innocent people corrupted by the vices introduced by the Dutch were not, however, entirely original: Elsewhere we have looked at how the image of the 'degenerate and lazy' Javanese had been developed in the work of the Englishman Thomas Stamford Raffles, in his *History of Java* (1817) which was a backhanded critique of Dutch colonial rule.[100]

The Chinese were a 'closed book' for Reynolds, for he noted that their kingdom was vast but as yet unknown to the outside world. Reynolds was clearly impressed by the size of the Celestial Kingdom, and he was particularly excited by the economic prospects of American trade with China – 'What a prospect for a merchant!' he noted.[101] At the same time he opined that China was a land where time 'stood still', and where the government was weak and overextended, and where the rulers were suspicious of all foreigners. Here one is reminded of the work of another East India Company-man, John Crawfurd, whose writing on the Kingdom of Burma in the 1820s likewise presented Burma as a land 'burdened by tyranny' and waiting to be opened up to foreign trade, if only the 'tyrannical ruler' of the kingdom could be deposed first.[102] Frustrated by what he regarded as stubbornness on the part of China's rulers, he ventured the idea that one of China's many thousands of islands could, and should, be used as a base for international trade,[103] and he looked to the British-controlled port of Singapore as his model.[104]

It is worth noting that there is an obvious difference between the work of Reynolds and the work of Warriner, and it lies in the fact that while Warriner was concerned about the spread of Christianity across Southeast

99 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 280.
100 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.
101 Ibid., pp. 360-362, 367.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., p. 384.
104 Ibid., p. 386.

and East Asia, Reynolds was more interested in the opening up of new trade routes and the pacification of the seas for the sake of American shipping. Warriner, who saw God everywhere and in everything, was concerned that the light of salvation would not shine on the soul of Asia, while Reynolds was more concerned that the light should shine on American ships carrying precious cargo across the Pacific. However in both instances, Asia and Asians are relegated to the background of a wider drama – where Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' or the hand of God was at play.

Lumped together along with the Asian Other were the Europeans, who were seen as colonizers who have 'conquered and dethroned, oppressed and enslaved' their way across Asia. Elsewhere in the work Reynolds revealed his own disdain towards some European nations in particular, such as the Portuguese.[105] Of the Dutch in Java Reynolds was as critical as he had been towards the Portuguese of Brazil. He described the Dutch as 'boastful' and 'condescending', despite the fact that their city of Batavia was in a state of squalor and disrepair.[106]

The distinction between America and the other nations of Europe that Reynolds draws is one that is divided along a moral faultline; and later in the text when he recounts the earlier exploits of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British in Asia he paints a sordid picture of rapacious, predatory Europeans at war with each other and with Asians too. European commerce was, for him, laced with intrigue and bad faith; and in this regard all Europeans were guilty. Despite his own Anglophile tendencies which pop up again and again in his narrative, Reynolds does not spare the British either, and admonishes the British East India Company for its handling of India. He lamented what had been done to India by the Company, and wondered how 'a nation like Great Britain, so watchfully jealous of her commercial rights, should so long have permitted her honour to remain in the keeping of a heartless, grasping and almost irresponsible Company'.[107] What Reynolds chose to omit from this diatribe against the East India Company was the fact that Thomas Stamford Raffles, whose work on Java

105 Of the Portuguese in Brazil, Reynolds found little good to say. He noted that they were suspicious and jealous of all foreigners; and that they suffered from want of hospitality. Of the lower classes of Rio, Reynolds remarked that they were filthy and vengeful to the extreme; while of the upper classes he noted that they were generally lazy and idle. He bemoaned the 'disgraceful' traces of slavery that he witnessed in Brazil, and commented at length about the behaviour and reputation of the Catholic priests, whom he summarily dismissed as cheats and liars (Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 39-40, 44, 45, 46, 51-53).

106 Ibid., 1835, p. 299.

107 Ibid., 1835, p. 373.

he so admired, was also a member of the very same 'heartless, grasping' company that had committed the injustices he professed to deplore.[108]

Turning to his own country and countrymen, Reynolds chose to valorize 'the maritime spirit and intelligence of our very own [American] merchants', who were 'no longer shackled by oppressive colonial restrictions' and were thus able to venture further abroad, to further the economic interests and ends of their new republic.[109] Later in the text he goes on to add that '[t]he British standard is no longer the undisputed master of the seas; other nations have some claims, some have the power too, on the great highway of nations'.[110]

It was this neat, oppositional dichotomy between America and every other nation that lends coherence and focus to Reynolds' work as a narrative written by an American, about Americans and for Americans. His was not an account intended to illuminate the natives of Southeast Asia, or the readers of Old World Europe. The America that emerges from his work is one that is strangely innocent wherever it goes, and oblivious to its faults. Reynolds contrasts the innocence of America's forays into Asia (as a noble quest for free trade driven by liberal ideals) to the injustices meted out by the Europeans who have plundered and conquered wherever they went. But he fails to note that his very own republic was then an expansionist power that was eating into the territories of Native Americans back home, whom he labelled as 'the primitive proprietors of American soil'. And like Warriner, who had condemned slavery in Brazil while omitting to mention the fact that it was also still in practice in America, Reynolds likewise failed to note that the brutally exploitative practices he saw in some of the Western colonies in Asia were not that much different to what was taking place in the American South at the same time.

Though he laboured to maintain these distinctions – between Americans on the one hand, and 'savage' Asiatic pirates and brutal European colonial powers on the other[111] – he could not undo what had been done at Kuala

108 Reynolds displayed his Anglophile tendencies as he compared the British in favourable terms against the Dutch. He commended the work of Stamford Raffles (p. 273) and noted the dress, customs, food and manners of the Javanese, drawing from Raffles' earlier work on the subject (pp. 273-286). It is interesting to note that many of Reynolds' criticisms of the Dutch were similar to those of Raffles', whose work on Java (1817) was likewise highly critical of Dutch colonization there.

109 Ibid., p. 373.

110 Ibid., p. 416. Footnote '*'

111 Later in the narrative Reynolds would give his impression of the Dutch as the *Potomac* sailed pass the Sunda Strait and headed to Batavia. He noted that the Dutch, 'who had monopolized all trade, had become more insolent than ever' (p. 271), and that they had been responsible

Batu; and could not dispute the fact that Americans had indeed performed their first gunboat action in the Indies. The kind of American exceptionalism that Reynolds attempted framed America as a particular country, but it could not wash away the fact that the liberal free-trading republic that he defended had also become an armed and aggressive power. America had drawn blood, and the only difference between Reynolds and the other European writers of his time was his insistence that his country was not in the business of empire-building. But when it came to defending America's commercial interests abroad and the safety of American lives, he was just as inclined to shoot first and ask questions later.

2.VII Far from the madding crowd: Embedded writers and the beginnings of American scholarship on Southeast Asia

The First Sumatran Expedition was in some respects a unique venture. Commodore Downes and the officers of the *Potomac* could not have predicted the outcome of the mission, and had no idea that their actions would be the cause of such controversy afterwards. That the *Potomac* would carry with her two men – Francis Warriner and Jeremiah Reynolds – who would write about the mission in detail was a case of serendipity in attendance, for their testimonies would play an important part in the settling of accounts much later.

The works by Warriner and Reynolds are remarkably alike, which should not come as a surprise as both men were, after all reporting on events on board the same ship. (Reynolds completed his manuscript in April 1835 and Warriner in May.) Both writers made mention of sickness in the East Indies, and both recounted instances of ill-discipline during the final stage of the *Potomac*'s voyage back to America. Warriner's narrative was comparatively dry in its description of events while more critical in its moral tone; but Reynolds' work was meant to be more persuasive, for he had stated from the outset that the aim of his book was to respond to the allegations that had been made against the captain and crew of the *Potomac* back in the United States.[112] His own stand in favour of Commodore

for the massacre of 12,000 Chinese in October 1740 (p. 272). Later he noted that the Dutch had introduced commercial farming to Java, compelling the Javanese to plant pepper and coffee in particular, which he regarded as an exploitative practice that burdened the Javanese peasants (p. 292).

112 In the work Reynolds alluded to the overheated discussion in the American media as a result of the Kuala Batu attack: 'Partial statements relative to the occurrences at Quallah-Battoo have

Downes was evident throughout his work, and his stated aim was to salvage the reputation of Commodore Downes and the American Navy by extension. To that end, Reynolds marshalled all the resources that he could lay his hands on, and the most important bits of information and evidence found in his work were the original orders and letters that had passed between Downes and the US Navy high command prior, during and after the expedition.[113]

Whether the American public was persuaded by Reynolds' account is an open question. What is interesting to note, however, is that in their account of the *Potomac*'s mission, Reynolds and Warriner did not disguise or conceal certain facts: neither of them denied that native women and children were killed in the fighting; and neither author exaggerated the number of American casualties, or underestimate the number of Sumatran losses.[114] Both Warriner and Reynolds noted that Kuala Batu was practically razed to the ground after the major forts by the beach had been destroyed. For Reynolds in particular it was clear that the *Potomac* was on a military mission to exact revenge for an act of piracy, and certainly not a goodwill mission to make friends. While both Warriner and Reynolds regretted the fact that the Kuala Batu incident had been taken up by the media back in America and used by some parties as a means to vilify the Jackson administration (1829-1837), their own works were intended to be factual and comprehensive. And it was for the American readership that their works were written, for Reynolds believed that the American public was 'always just, when correctly informed'.[115]

Here it should be noted that both works were, in their own way, informative in a manner that far surpassed the kind of hackneyed journalism Reynolds so decried. Setting aside Reynolds' own obvious fondness for Commodore Downes, the works of Warriner and Reynolds were also studies of Sumatran society that tried to match the works done by the English

been published by the journals of the day; and those papers had now reached the Pacific. The attention of Congress had been called to the subject' (Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. vi-vii).

113 In Reynolds' work, these documents were made public for the first time, and they are featured in the main text as well as the lengthy appendix that come at the end of the book – from pages 523 to 560.

114 The total list of Americans killed and wounded included: William Smith, sailor; Benjamin Brown, marine (killed); and Lt William Edson, J.W. Taylor, Daniel Cole, Henry Dutcher, Peter Walsh, Levi McCabe, John Dubois, John Addison, James Huster, James Nolan and James McCabe (wounded). Reynolds also noted that the principal Rajah responsible for the attack on the *Friendship*, Puulow Yemet (Pak Muhammad) was killed, as well as one of the wives of the Rajahs (Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 536).

115 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. vii.

scholar-merchants William Marsden[116] and John Anderson.[117] Reynolds also devoted several pages of his work on the subject of the cultivation of pepper – the very commodity that was the cause of the *Friendship*'s misfortune and the carnage at Kuala Batu later.[118] In short, both works were among the first (albeit amateur) studies of Sumatra written by Americans in the 1830s, marking the early beginnings of American scholarship on Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century – where for the first time Americans could read works about lands far away, written by their fellow Americans.

The First Sumatran Expedition of 1832 was not to be the last. Another attack on an American merchant ship would take place six years later just as the ruckus over the first expedition was about to die down. In 1838, the American merchant vessel *Eclipse* was boarded and attacked by Sumatrans. News of the attack soon spread across the region, and another punitive action was performed, where once again Kuala Batu and the settlement of Muckie (Meukek) were attacked by troops and bombarded from sea. As in the case of the First Sumatran Expedition, the second attack on Sumatra would be documented as well by Fitch Waterman Taylor, whose work we shall look at later.[119]

The fate of those who took part in the First Sumatran Expedition was mixed: Senator Silsbee, Robert Stone and Andrew Dunlop of the company of Silsbee, Pickman and Stone felt themselves vindicated as a result of the punitive expedition that seemed (for a few years at least) to secure Sumatra's coast safe for American merchant shipping. President Andrew Jackson won the Presidential race in 1832 and continued his campaign to relocate Native Americans to special reservations, adding a hundred million acres to the territory of the United States; and survived two attacks on himself (in 1833 and 1835).

Commodore John Downes, however, was not as fortunate. After his return to the United States he found himself entangled in the maelstrom of accusations that would linger over him for years to come. Present-day scholars like Herring have concluded that 'the impulsive captain [Downes] decided to shoot first and talk later'.[120] Though President Jackson publicly defended the Commodore, 'condemning the Malays as a "band of lawless pirates" and admitting that his purpose was to "inflict a chastisement as would deter them from further aggressions"', Herring also notes that Jackson

116 See Marsden, which came out in 1784 and was later republished in 1811, with a new and updated map of Sumatra. For an account of Marsden's role as the doyen of East Indian studies, see Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

117 See Anderson.

118 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 149-156.

119 See Taylor, *The Flag Ship*.

120 Herring, p. 170.

was annoyed that Downes had exceeded his orders, and 'assigned him to finish his career as an inspector of lighthouses.'[121] Downes would retire as the Commander of the Charlestown Naval Yard, and have three American ships named after him. In 1835, the American Navy established its own East India Squadron, but Commodore Downes was never given another command at sea. Though Downes was destined to carry the burden of blame for what happened at Kuala Batu, the First Sumatra Expedition had demonstrated in no uncertain terms that America was willing to use force against weaker nations that were deemed less civilized, as Herring concluded:

> Jackson's gunboat diplomacy reveals much about U.S. foreign policy in the 1830s. It makes clear the nation's contempt for 'lesser' peoples, its determination to command respect as a great power, and its conviction that military force could be used to alter the behaviour of others.[122]

Francis Warriner would not write another major work after his account of the cruise of the *Potomac*, and would fade away into the background of history. Decades later Reverend Edwin Warriner's *History of the Warriner Family of New England* (1899) would include an entry about a certain Francis Warriner who would become a Baptist Deacon in his later life.[123] The indefatigable Jeremiah Reynolds would continue to labour his pen. Later in 1839 he published 'Mocha Dick: or the White Whale of the Pacific',[124] the work that would inspire Herman Melville's American classic *Moby-Dick* (1851). He continued to write and lecture about the need for Americans to explore the world, and he even had a go at several mining explorations in Mexico, before he passed away in 1858. Reynolds' critique of the popular tabloid press, however, did little to curb the excesses of the media, and in the decades that followed the American press would continue to play a partisan role in domestic politics as well as the country's foreign policy – all the way to the Spanish-American War of 1898 and America's invasion of the Philippines.[125] The First Sumatran Expedition, and the second attack on Kuala Batu and Meukek that followed in 1838, would mark America's explosive arrival in maritime Southeast Asia; though true to the words of Reynolds America would not and did not use it as a pretext for expansionism across the East Indies.

121 Ibid., pp. 170-171.
122 Ibid., p. 171.
123 Warriner, *History*, p. 140.
124 Reynolds, *Mocha Dick*.
125 See Pérez.

Kuala Batu today has no monuments or anything that may remind its residents or visitors of what happened there in the 1830s, but it would remain in the American imaginary for decades to come. On page 751 of Volume 3 of Edward S. Ellis' *The History of Our Country* (1898) is a reproduction of the painting by J. Carter Beard, entitled *The Battle of Quallah Battoo*. Beard's painting, though somewhat fanciful, offers a glimpse of what took place in the north Sumatran settlement decades earlier. At the centre of the action is a somewhat dramatic encounter between an American bluejacket, rifle in hand, about to bayonet a fallen Sumatran adversary. Standing between the attacking American soldier and the wounded Sumatran warrior is the figure of a Sumatran woman, who grabs the attention of the viewer by her dramatic gesture of gripping the American's bayonet with both hands, preventing him from going for the kill. With the controversy surrounding the attack long forgotten and the principal actors long dead, the Kuala Batu affair would later be presented as one of the turning points in American history, and Ellis chose to highlight it in his chapter on Jackson's Presidency (1829-1837).[126] Divided though American opinion was about the righteousness of the affair, America's own sense of identity was framed as a result of it. And in time more facts did come to light, and we can even name the bluejacket who is about to stab at the fallen Sumatran in Beard's painting: John L. Dubois. But the identity of the Sumatran woman who grips at Dubois' bayonet remains unknown, and the fate that befell her and the people of Kuala Batu continues to divide the jury.

126 The Kuala Batu incident was recounted in Ellis' history thus: 'In 1832 Andrew Jackson was the President of the United States and Levi Woodbury was Secretary of the Navy. It took several months to bring intelligence of the outrage [referring to the attack on the merchant ship *Friendship*] to our government, but then the news arrived at last, and 'something was done'. On the 9th of August, Commodore John Downes, of the United States Frigate *Potomac*, was ordered to repair without delay to Sumatra, by way of the Cape of Good Hope. [...] Upon arriving at Quallah Battoo, he was directed to take such steps as would give him the fullest and most accurate information not only concerning the outrage but the character of the government. It was impressed upon Commodore Downes that he was to use utmost care, tact and delicacy to prevent any injustice or mistake. From the proper authorities he was to demand the restoration of stolen property or indemnity thereof, and the prompt punishment of the murderers of the crew of the *Friendship*. If those demands were refused, Commodore Downes was instructed to do his utmost to seize the murderers and send them to Washington for trial as pirates, to retake the property of the *Friendship*, to destroy boats and vessels of any kind engaged in piracy, and the forts and dwellings near the scene of the outrage.' See Ellis, *The History of Our Country*, vol. 3, pp. 750-751.

3 Friends, but not equals

Edmund Roberts' mission to Siam and the birth of American Orientalism

> Our widely extended trade in these seas, without a single port of our own nearer than those of our own shores, forms an unparalleled case in the East.[1]
> – Joseph Balestier, American Resident in Singapore, letter to Washington, DC, 4 June 1838

3.I In search of friends: America's mission to Siam

> The United States of America is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.[2]
> – John Quincy Adams, 'Speech to the US House of Representatives on Foreign Policy', 4 July 1821

The attack on Kuala Batu and the outcome of the First Sumatran Expedition revealed a lot about the state of America's relations with Southeast Asia in the 1830s. For starters, America's knowledge of Southeast Asia was sparse and drawn from secondary sources. Compounding matters further was the fact that America did not have any seasoned 'Asia hands' with expert knowledge of the region to send there. Richard Hale's work on the life of Joseph Balestier, America's first Resident and Special Agent to Singapore, is instructive in this respect: Hale notes that when Balestier arrived in Singapore in May 1834 he had no understanding of the politics of Cochinchina and Siam, and was not certain of what he was meant to do.[3] Balestier was formerly engaged in the sugar trade, while John Revely, whom Balestier later appointed as the American Consular Agent in Penang, was a trader as well.[4] Neither of these men had any experience in diplomatic affairs, and yet found

1 Quoted in Hale, p. 301.

2 Adams, 'Speech'.

3 Hale noted that Joseph Balestier was keen to promote American interests in the other parts of Southeast Asia that were not under the influence or control of the British, and had taken it upon himself to seek opportunities to further American interests in Cochinchina and Siam. But 'it is doubtful if Balestier, despite his contacts, had any real understanding of the Emperor [of Annam's] policies' (p. 304), and he 'had no direct experience of Siam' either, and was thus 'unaware of the political situation in Bangkok at the time of his arrival' (pp. 307-308).

4 Hale, pp. 4-6, 84.

themselves in the enviable position of representing their country abroad. It was then painfully obvious to all that American merchant vessels operating in Southeast Asian waters were trading in an ad hoc manner, collecting cargo and selling wherever they could with whomever they could, and constantly on the lookout for adversaries, both Asian and European.[5] The absence of an American naval presence in Southeast Asia rendered American shipping vulnerable, as did the fact that America had been unable to secure a working relationship with any of the native Southeast Asian polities that were still independent then. America had neither a naval base nor a trading station in the region to call its own, and was therefore in need of friends.

A potential friend to America was to be found not too far away. To the northeast of Sumatra and beyond the Malay Peninsula was the kingdom of Siam, which was well-known to all the European powers. For centuries Siam had been engaged in commercial relations with both Asian and European nations: Persians had settled at the court of Ayutthaya, as had the Portuguese and other Europeans. In the 1830s the kingdom had come under the rule of King Nangklao (r. 1824-1851), otherwise known as Rama III of the Chakri dynasty of Bangkok. Siam was then still a power to be reckoned with: Rama III's forces had managed to put down the Laotian rebellion of 1826-1829, and from 1831 had begun to move into Cambodia and southern Vietnam. The king was firmly at the centre of his country's political universe, though Siam's external relations were handled by the *Praklang* (Principal Minister), Chao Phaya.

The American government, then under President Jackson, felt that the time was right to send an official envoy to Southeast Asia with the intention of negotiating a treaty of peace and commerce between the United States and the countries there. This period – between 1820 to 1840 – was the time when the American economy began to grow rapidly, as Herring has noted:

> Construction of roads and canals brought scattered communities together and, along with the steamboat, shrank distances. These innovations dramatically transformed the predominantly agricultural, subsistence economy of Jefferson's time. Americans increasingly prided themselves on their political separation from Europe, but the US was an integral part of an Atlantic-centred international economy.[6]

5 American ships out alone in the East Indies were constantly on the alert in case of pirate attacks, and also wary of European vessels. In January 1797, the American merchant ship *The Rajah* that was commanded by Jonathan Carnes of Salem, Massachusetts, came under attack by a French vessel whose commander mistakenly thought that *The Rajah* was a British ship.

6 Herring, p. 137.

Americans looked abroad and saw a global theatre where American economic interest could flourish, and the men who were sent abroad by the American government reflected this earnest desire to see American influence grow. The man chosen for the task was the former merchant-turned-diplomat, Edmund Roberts of New Hampshire, who was 'an imperious figure, and like most Americans of his time strongly nationalistic'.[7]

That Edmund Roberts was destined to become America's first official envoy to the East Indies was hardly the result of chance. Indeed, Roberts' personal fortune then was hardly good by any standards: His foray into the world of international shipping and commerce had led to some losses, and he was well acquainted with the dangers of maritime trade. In his youth he had turned down the opportunity to serve in the United States Navy, but later would be involved in the business of trans-Atlantic trade between the United States, the Caribbean and Britain. Like many of his generation (he was born in 1784) he had lived through the War of 1812 and fully appreciated the need for an American naval force that could defend its shipping everywhere. For decades American merchants and mariners – such as the members of the East Indies Marine Society based in Salem, Massachusetts – had lobbied for more proactive measures to protect American ships in foreign waters, and to have better intelligence about the polities of Southeast Asia.

Roberts' opportunity arrived as a result of the misfortune that befell the American merchant vessel *Friendship*. As the American government made preparations for the First Sumatran Expedition that would culminate in the punitive action against Kuala Batu, another ship – the schooner-of-war USS *Peacock* – was being readied for an exploratory mission abroad. On 27 January 1832, Roberts was given the task of 'Special Agent' (known only to himself and not even the crew) to travel with the USS *Peacock* to the East Indies to gather as much information as possible about the local polities there, and to establish diplomatic relations if possible. The schooner USS *Enterprise*, commanded by Commodore Edmund P. Kennedy, was also present as escort. Roberts accepted the mission entrusted to him, and for the next three years (1832 to 1834) would find himself at sea, travelling further than he had ever been before. The net result of his journey to Southeast Asia was America's first treaty with a Southeast Asian state, and his book, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat; in the US Sloop-of-war* Peacock*, David Geisinger, Commander, during the Years 1832-3-4*, that would later be published posthumously in 1837. Though he never lived to see it come out

7 Ibid., p. 169.

in print, Roberts' work would also go down in history as the first of its kind, and mark the birth of American Orientalism in Southeast Asia.

3.II 'Not a single vessel of war was to be seen': Roberts' mission to secure a friend for America

To say that Edmund Roberts was worried about the safety of American ships and merchants in the East would be an understatement. His work was dedicated to the Honourable Levi Woodbury, who like him hailed from New Hampshire, and who in 1831 was appointed Secretary of the Navy. He noted in the introduction of his work that American trade in the East could not be compared to that of the British, who were raking in profits that were vastly greater than the Americans. It was to his friend Levi Woodbury that Roberts turned to, and both men saw the need for a more proactive approach on the part of America to seek new alliances and trading partners in Asia.[8] Woodbury was keen to ensure that American shipping in Asian waters would remain unmolested, and earlier he had played his own part in the First Sumatran Expedition: It was Woodbury who provided Jeremiah Reynolds access to the papers related to the Kuala Batu affair, which in turn allowed Reynolds to write his account of the conduct of the Americans in their attack on the Sumatran settlement.[9]

The attack on the American vessel *Friendship* off the coast of Kuala Batu was, for both Roberts and Woodbury, proof that American shipping in the East was vulnerable. In his introduction Roberts applauded the actions of the USS *Potomac* which led to the chastisement of the 'hostile act of these barbarians'.[10] The USS *Peacock* was also directed to Sumatra for the same purpose, but following the bombardment and destruction of the settlement at Kuala Batu was free to proceed with its own mission, which was to collect intelligence about the native states of Southeast Asia. Cochinchina and Siam were the true objectives of the *Peacock*, and, as Roberts pointed out that at the time, 'American commerce was placed on a most precarious footing [there], and subject to every species of imposition which avarice might think proper to inflict, as the price of an uncertain protection'.[11]

8 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 5.
9 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 9.
10 Roberts, *Embassy*, pp. 5-6.
11 Ibid., p. 6.

It was the precariousness of the American position in Southeast Asia that drove Roberts' mission, and its goal was to secure a lasting peace with a local state whereby American trade could prosper undisturbed. Throughout the account of his mission, Roberts was obsessed with the thought of danger, deceit and vulnerability. With the Kuala Batu incident fresh in his mind, he painted a bleak picture of the state of American shipping across Asia, which highlighted the defenceless nature of American maritime activity then:

> The unprotected state of our merchant shipping from the Cape of Good Hope to the waters of Japan, including our valuable whale-fishery, was painfully impressed upon my attention in the course of the Embassy. Not a single vessel of war was to be seen waving our national flag over our extensive commerce from the West of Africa to the East of Japan; our merchant-men, trading to Sumatra, Java and the Philippine islands, are totally unprotected. The extent of our commerce may be estimated from the fact that there arrived in two ports of Java in one year, one hundred and one ships, the united tonnage of which, amounted to *thirty-eight thousand, eight hundred and seventy-seven tons*. [...] The protection of this important and prolific branch of commerce is, in every point of view, a political and moral advantage.[12]

Roberts himself did not encounter any of the 'barbarian pirates' that worried him so, though he noted that the *Peacock* did pass by the island of Pulau Panjang which was said 'to be used as a place of resort by Malay pirates'.[13] But if Roberts was worried about the safety of American ships, cargo and men, he was equally sceptical about the Asians whom he hoped would guarantee their safety. The Sumatrans were dismissed as barbarians, and in his dealings with the rulers of Cochinchina he was left with a decidedly negative impression, too

Roberts' ship first landed near present-day Qui Nhon in Southern Vietnam and his attempt to negotiate a treaty with the ruler of Cochinchina was a failure, and he was exasperated by the courtiers he had to deal with[14]:

12 Ibid., pp. 6-7. Emphasis in the original.

13 Ibid., p. 228.

14 Among the many complaints that Roberts had about the Cochinchinese courtiers he met was their formality and their insistence that he give them his full name, along with all his titles. Roberts recounts the episode thus: 'During the discussion with the Mandarins relative to the letter which was to be written to the minister, I refused to consider him in any other light than my equal in rank, as they were so strongly disposed to exalt him, and debase me if possible. The deputies expressed some surprise at this observation, and demanded upon what ground I claimed an equality with them;

> The insulting formalities required as the preliminaries to the treaty, by the ministers from the capital of Cochin-China, left me no alternative save that of terminating a protracted correspondence, singularly marked from its commencement to its termination by duplicity and prevarication in the official servants of the emperor.[15]

The major obstacle he faced came in the form of the courtly rituals and protocols of the powers-that-be in Hue, which he did not appreciate. Roberts was offended when he was asked to re-write President Jackson's letter to the king of Cochinchina in such a manner that implied that the president of the United States was the lesser between the two.[16] The discussions he had with the Cochinchinese 'constituted a classic cross-cultural exercise in futility' and the Vietnamese were unimpressed by the republican ethos of the Americans on the grounds that a President who was elected by commoners could not possibly have the same status and authority as their exalted king.[17] But at this stage of his mission Roberts did not have enough information about the country to realize that the ruler of Cochinchina probably had other things to worry about: The Siamese-Cambodian War (also known as the Siamese-Vietnam War) of 1831-1834 had broken out, and Siamese forces were moving into Cambodia and southern Vietnam.

If it was any consolation, Roberts was not the first to fail. The ruler had previously refused to meet the British Resident John Crawfurd (in 1822) and the French consul had likewise been snubbed. Only a few Europeans had managed to get anywhere close to the ruler of Cochinchina, and among the first was the Swiss merchant Auguste Borel, who in 1819 managed to deliver 10,000 pieces of assorted weaponry to the Cochinchinese at the request of their ruler. Borel was lavished with tea, sugar and supplies of raw silk in turn.[18] Having given up on the Cochinchinese rulers, it was to Siam that Roberts turned to next, and it was there that he would leave his mark for posterity.

they were answered, as the representative of an independent power. They then asked what were my titles; if they were of as much importance as the minister's, and if they were as numerous. They were told that there was no order of nobility in the United States, and so they had been previously informed. Still they insisted that there must be something equivalent to it' (ibid., p. 217).

15 Ibid., p. 6.

16 After waiting for eight days for a favourable reply from the ruler of Cochinchina, Roberts came to the conclusion that the mission was a failure. The negotiations faltered for the simple reason that he refused to re-write the letter to the Cochinchinese government using the terms that were suggested by the latter, for the wording of the letter would suggest veneration for the ruler of the kingdom (Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 214).

17 Herring, pp. 168-169.

18 Zangger, pp. 19-20, 21.

3.III The great unknown: Edmund Roberts' arrival in Siam

> We come as independent people. […] Let your statesmen preserve their customs, and we will preserve ours.[19]
> – Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat*

Roberts' failure to secure a treaty with the rulers of Cochinchina did not deter him or weaken his resolve. In his mind he had come to Southeast Asia as an *American*, and was not about to let the natives forget it. In the intermezzo between the Cochinchina and Siam missions, he noted in his narrative that:

> Previous to visiting Cochin-China, I had laid down certain rules of conduct, which I had resolved to adopt towards these people, as well as the Siamese. In the first place, I had determined to adhere most strictly to the truth, however detrimental it might be to the interest of our commerce at present, or however unpalatable it might be to either of the nations. I had further resolved, not to submit to any degrading ceremonies, by performing the *Ko-tow*, uncovering the feet, etc. etc. My answer to such requisitions would be: We do not come here to change the customs of your court with its own statesmen, but we come as independent people, for a short interview. Let your statesmen preserve their customs, and we will preserve ours.[20]

Just how long Roberts would be able to maintain the distinction and distance between himself and the Siamese would be revealed later, as he came to learn more about the Siamese people and the land of Siam.

Roberts' account of the history of Siam was quite impressive for a man who had only lately been made special envoy to the East Indies,[21] and his initial

19 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 219.

20 Ibid., p. 219.

21 When recounting the history of Siam, Roberts seemed to be familiar with the popular accounts of the time. He did note that Siam had long been engaged in relations with the other neighbouring kingdoms of Southeast Asia (though not always on cordial terms), and that the British, French and Portuguese had been on the scene long before the arrival of the Americans: 'Siam appears to have no place in history, prior to the introduction of the Budhist [sic] religion, in the year of Christ, 638, when a sovereign by the name of Krek governed the country. In 1521, their first intercourse with Europeans (the Portuguese) took place. […] In the year 1621, a Portuguese mission was sent to Siam, by the Portuguese viceroy of Goa; and in the same year, some Roman Catholic missionaries first made their appearance. […] In 1690, a revolution took place, and the reigning family lost the throne; the minister, Phaulcon, lost his life, and the French were expelled

impression of Bangkok and its environs was positive. He described the stately buildings, the habitations of the Siamese and Chinese, the merchandise found in the markets and the state of the Siamese army in detail. Noting the depth of the river and the number of vessels he saw around him, he came to the conclusion that Bangkok was indeed a thriving centre of commerce that was prospering. When meeting the Siamese for the first time, he appreciated the fact that they took his visit seriously and was obviously making an effort to impress the foreigners:

> The gentlemen composing the company, the servants on each flank with their numerous flambeaux, with many hundreds lookers-on, made no small show, and produced, upon the whole, rather an imposing effect, for this was the first envoy ever sent to 'the magnificent King of Siam' from the United States.[22]

Roberts was keen to begin negotiations as quickly as possible, and this he did in the company of Captain Geisinger and the other officers of the USS *Peacock*.[23] The first few days of their stay in Bangkok were pleasant enough, and Roberts writes about the various formal dinners, excursions and entertainments that were laid out for them as the courtiers began their work of drafting and translating a treaty that could be accepted by both parties. A week after they had arrived the Americans were finally brought before the king himself, and Roberts' account of the audience at the palace read as follows:

> We entered at length the vestibule through a line of soldiers, and passed to the right of a Chinese screen of painted glass, into the presence of his majesty. There lay prostrate, or rather on all fours resting on their knees and elbows, with hands united and head bowed low, all the princes and nobility of the land: it was an impressive but an abasing sight, such as no freeman could look on, with any other feelings than those of indignation and disgust. We halted in front of the presents which were delivered the day previous, being piles of silks, rich fillagreed [sic] silver baskets, elegant gold watches

from the country, which destroyed their hopes of establishing a French empire in the East, until the year 1787, when they made that famous treaty with Cochin-China, ceding the peninsula of Haw, the bay of Turam, &c.; but which failed in consequence of the troublesome state of public affairs in France, at that period, followed by the revolution. Since that time, and within the last five years, the French government sent a frigate to Cochin-China, and endeavoured, but without effect, to have the treaty ratified' (ibid., pp. 298-299).

22 Ibid., p. 231.

23 Ibid., pp. 236-237.

> studded with large pearls: they were well disposed to make a show. Having gone through the first ceremony of bowing, we sat down on a carpet: on our being seated the prostrate slaves around us (being the great men of the land) bowed simultaneously three times to the ground, in a slow solemn manner, and we joined in the ceremony as had been previously agreed upon. The king was seated under a canopy, in the Asiatic style, on a cushion of red silk velvet, on the lower and more advanced of the two thrones, which occupied the upper end of the apartment: this was a square seat raised some half dozen feet from the floor. Everything was blazing in gold.[24]

Roberts' feeling of 'indignation and disgust' at the sight of so many nobles and courtiers bowing before their ruler would be one of the recurrent themes of his narrative, and would be the marker of difference that defined his identity vis-à-vis the Siamese. It was clear that Roberts could not understand or appreciate the Siamese 'love of the disciplined surface'[25]; and their need to maintain order and decorum in the public domain, which may have lent a certain theatricality to everything that the courtiers did. As far as he was concerned their public displays of power, status and wealth were all for show, and he read it as a grotesque pantomime that was decidedly foreign, unmanly and un-Christian.

This acute sense of difference would grow in time, as Roberts' mission dragged on and on while the negotiation over the terms of the treaty plodded on at a snail's pace. Having visited the choicest locations in the city, Roberts' narrative meanders along and moves into other topics and domains that had nothing to do with his mission: He gives an account of the types of snakes found in the river, the ways of catching them, the commercial uses of snakeskin, and so forth and so on.[26] As they days wore on, his choice of topic seemed to veer from the mundane to the ghoulish and macabre: At one point he recounts to the reader the 'horrible custom which occasionally prevails here: [where] many Siamese give directions that their dead bodies shall be stripped of the flesh and given to dogs, and carniverous [sic] birds, which infest the neighbourhood of the altars, and the bones only are burnt'.[27] Though he was so far away from home, Roberts' narrative was also peppered with allusions to his own country, to the extent that even the alligators and mosquitoes of Siam reminded him of the same reptiles and insects back in Louisiana and Texas:

24 Ibid., p. 256.
25 Morris, p.180.
26 Roberts, *Embassy*, pp. 259-261.
27 Ibid., p. 267.

> Alligators bask in the sun at the foot of the ladder or under their buildings, and moschetoes [sic] bear the palm here over the swamps of Louisiana and Texas, coming in myriads so as partially to obscure the sun.[28]

Roberts' rapport with the alligators and mosquitoes, as well as the markets and canals, of Bangkok was unproblematic. He expressed his appreciation of the climate and the food he ate, and did note that Siamese buildings were pleasing to the eye. What he did have a problem with, and what was displeasing to his eye, was the conduct of the Siamese people he had come to negotiate with. His overall impression of the Siamese was mixed, though decidedly better than the impression he had of the Cochinchinese. Though he was unaccustomed to their customs, he was at least appreciative of the fact that they bathed regularly and that their faces were not covered with acne and pimples:

> Although the Siamese are not a cleanly people, they are far superior to the Cochin-Chinese; they bathe frequently, and their skins are clear and free of eruptions, and they do not everlastingly scratch, scratch and keep scratching, like the people of Vunglam.[29]

It doesn't take long for the reader to scratch beneath the surface of Roberts' own narrative to discover his pet peeves though. While acne-free complexions were a plus for him, Roberts loathed the Siamese habit of betel-chewing and the effect that it had on the teeth and lips of the locals: 'Their coal-black teeth are excessively disgusting, and the saliva created by chewing areca, siri-leaf and tobacco, is constantly issuing in a red stream, from their mouths.'[30]

Granted that he was not obliged to kiss every local he met, Roberts' narrative covered a range of other topics related to all things Siamese. The puritan tone of his work, and the manner in which he presented the beliefs and customs of the Siamese in disparaging terms, was partly the result of his own Christian upbringing. But there are moments in his narrative when it is clear that Roberts' disinclination for the exotic had as much to do with

28 Ibid., p. 233.

29 Ibid., p. 235. Earlier in his account of the people of Cochinchina Roberts described the Cochinchinese thus: 'The inhabitants are without exception the most filthy people in the world. As soon as the boat touches the strand, out rush from their palm-leaf huts, men and women, and naked children and dogs, all having a mangy appearance; being covered with some scorbutic disease, the itch or small-pox, and frequently with white leprous spots' (pp. 220-221).

30 Ibid., p. 236, 238, 239.

his own tastes and preferences as his morality. On the subject of Siamese women, for instance, Roberts was hardly flattering:

> The hair of the Siamese women is cut like that of the men; their countenances are, in fact, more masculine than those of the males: they are generally very fat, having very stout lower limbs and arms; are excessively ugly; and when they open their mouths, utterly hideous; resembling the inside of a painted black sepulchre.[31]

That so much of his narrative was dedicated to the subject of the Siamese and their customs suggests the extent to which he was in daily contact with them. After his failure to secure a treaty with the Cochinchinese it was not surprising that Roberts was anxious about his mission to Siam, and as the days wore on he grew increasingly frustrated by the delay and the fact that he had to participate in the rituals of the court. It didn't take long for him to blow his fuse, and when that happened Roberts' own cultural biases were laid bare.

The cause of Roberts' frustration was the Principal Minister with whom he was forced to negotiate with. Roberts recounts his meeting with the *Praklang* in terms that clearly demarcated the cultural differences between the Americans and their Asian host. The Minister was described as 'a very heavy unwieldy man' who 'weighed nearly three hundred pounds', and whose palace was a mish-mash of Oriental and European furnishings.[32] As is repeated elsewhere in his narrative, Roberts unceasingly draws the reader's attention to the demeanour of the Siamese courtiers and servants, which he describes as brutish and humiliating[33]:

> Every sort of humiliation is practised by the lower to the higher classes, according to their rank: from that of making a simple obeisance by uniting their hands, and raising them to the forehead, and bowing the head low, to kneeling, and the entire prostration of the body.[34]

The limit was reached when Roberts was told in no uncertain terms that he was obliged to grease the wheels of diplomacy, and was left fuming: This occurred when the *Praklang* demanded a 'gift' from him as a token of

31 Ibid., p. 240.
32 Ibid., pp. 236-237.
33 Ibid., p. 237.
34 Ibid., p. 237.

friendship, and to ensure that the negotiations would proceed smoothly. Roberts' indignation with having to fulfil such a request was reported in the most colourful terms for the benefit of his American readers:

> To show the extreme indelicacy, in truth, grossness, of these people, even among the higher classes, the captain of the port, Piedade, was sent to me from the praklang, to say that the envoy from the United States would of course make a present, as Mr. [John] Crawfurd and the Portuguese consul had done before on similar occasion; being placed in rather a delicate situation, in regard to the treaty, having two troublesome points unsettled, I complied with this piece of sponging, and gave a hundred silver dollars, which were presented to the praklang in the course of the afternoon, in a gold vessel. [...] It was highly ludicrous, yet most disgusting, to see the general of the eleven ranks of nobility, who stands second in order, viz. a *phaya*, crawling like a dog on all fours, dressed in a striped silk cloak, bound round with heavy gold lace, shoving the vase before him till he came to the praklang, and delivering it, making his obeisance with hands united; then *backing out*, of 'the presence', in the same degrading position, till he reached me, to convey the man's thanks. The vase was then taken just beyond our table, and delivered to two persons, one of whom, I suppose, was the treasurer, and the other the Moorish or Chuliah secretary, who always makes his appearance, crawling on all fours. [...] The money was counted within our sight, and reported to the praklang to be *all right!!!*[35]

Three weeks had passed since his arrival and Roberts was fraying at the edges. Though the alligators and mosquitoes of Bangkok may have reminded him of the swamps of Louisiana, the *Praklang*'s request seemed to have pushed him over the edge, and what followed was a decidedly unflattering portrait of the Siamese as a whole, which could only be matched by John Crawfurd's equally blistering account of the Burmese, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* (1829):

> After a slight personal knowledge of only three weeks with these people, I infer that they are extremely disingenuous and fickle-minded, because many articles of the treaty, though passed and agreed upon in the evening, have the following day been subverted, or the strength of the language so weakened, as to take away nearly its whole force. That they are great intriguers, past history will confirm. [...] That these people are highly

35 Ibid., p. 246. Emphasis in the original.

> superstitious, is shown by their constant watching for the flight of vultures, and the worshipping of idols, and the ten thousand follies of the Buddhist religion. That they are servile, is a necessary consequence, arising out of their despotic government. Subordination of rank is carried out to a most degrading and revolting point; true politeness is therefore destroyed; they are abject to the extreme to superiors, and most insolent and disdainful to inferiors. [...] A people who are habitually crawling upon their knees and elbows, and performing 'the knock-head ceremony', cannot be otherwise than ungraceful and inelegant in their manners. [...] They are a most extravagantly vain people; are reputed to be very deficient in courage; excessively lascivious and immoral; of which proofs are presented at every step.[36]

Having vented his spleen, Roberts takes a break from writing about the Siamese, and the rest of the chapter delves on other lifeforms such as fish, birds, bats and snakes instead (though presumably some of these creatures were crawling on all fours as well). Amazingly, the treaty was eventually drafted for consultation and approval by both sides. (Perhaps Roberts' greasing of the palm of the *Praklang* paid off after all.) Aside from two minor points of contention, the document was finished for the envoy's perusal.

By all accounts Roberts should not have been displeased with the final product of his labour, despite the fact that the negotiations took so long. Finally completed on 20 March, the treaty which would later be commonly referred to as the Roberts Treaty, consisted of a preamble and ten articles (see Appendix A). The preamble began with a flourish, referring to the ruler of Siam as 'his Majesty the Sovereign and Magnificent King in the City of Sia-Yut'hia' and elevated Roberts as well, to the status of 'Minister of the United States'. It went on to state that the aim of the treaty was to secure 'sincere friendship and entire good faith between the two nations' and to that end 'the Siamese and the citizens of the United States of America shall, with sincerity, hold commercial intercourse in the Ports of their respective nations as long as heaven and earth shall endure'.[37]

That some degree of dexterity and compromise went into the final draft of the treaty is evident in the first article itself, which stated that 'there

36 Ibid., p. 248.

37 It was agreed that two original copies be produced, one in Siamese and one in English; and that a Portuguese and Chinese translation would be annexed to both copies. One copy was to be kept in Siam, and the other copy was to be brought by Roberts back to America, for approval and ratification by the American government.

shall be a perpetual Peace between the Magnificent King of Siam and the United States of America'. (While Roberts had refused to agree to the terms of the courtiers of Cochinchina because he refused to present his country in an inferior aspect before theirs.) The peace that was referred to in the first article of the treaty was a peace between a singular monarch (albeit a magnificent one) and a democratic republic (whose own greatness was left unmentioned), but Roberts had obviously allowed that to pass.

Article 2 went on to secure what Roberts had been looking for, namely the guarantee that

> the Citizens of the United States shall have free liberty to enter all the Ports of the Kingdom of Siam, with their cargoes, of whatever kind the said cargoes may consist; and they shall have liberty to sell the same to any of the subjects of the King, or others who may wish to purchase the same, or to barter the same for any produce or manufacture of the Kingdom, or other articles that may be found there.

Here at least there would be equality on both sides, as the article stated that 'trade shall be free on both sides to sell, or buy, or exchange, on the terms and for the prices the owners may think fit'. (Though it was added that armaments could only be sold to the king, and that opium would never be traded at all.) Article 3 of the treaty secured the freedom of American vessels to enter any of the ports within the territory of Siam, while Article 4 guaranteed that American vessels would have to pay the same duties that are levelled on the ships of other nations. Article 5 secured for American shipping another important commitment from Siam, which was to rescue any vessel wrecked in its waters, as well as its cargo and crew. As far as the rights of American citizens were concerned, Article 7 of the treaty assured the American government that 'merchants of the United States coming to trade in the Kingdom of Siam and wishing to rent houses therein, shall rent the King's Factories, and pay the customary rent of the country. If the said merchants bring their goods on shore, the King's officers shall take account thereof, but shall not levy any duty thereupon'. Roberts' lingering fear of piracy was addressed in Article 8, which stated that 'if any citizens of the United States, or their vessels, or other property, shall be taken by pirates and brought within the dominions of the Magnificent King, the persons shall be set at liberty, and the property restored to its owners'.

Though Roberts remained a republican down to his bootstraps, he did concede the point that American citizens living and working in Siam would have to live by the laws of the land; as stated in Article 9. As much as he was

unwilling to admit any equality between his people and the Siamese, this was a crucial point that Roberts had to agree to, for he had introduced the neat binary distinction between America and other nations many times before. If the republican in him expected foreigners to abide by the laws of the republic while in the United States, there was no way he could demand that Americans be given special treatment abroad.

But Roberts did manage to claim one *coup* that furthered America's position and standing in Siam: Article 10 of the treaty stated that 'if thereafter any foreign nation other than the Portuguese shall request and obtain His Majesty's consent to the appointment of Consuls to reside in Siam, the United States shall be at liberty to appoint Consuls to reside in Siam, equally with such other foreign nation'. The treaty was initially signed (before ratification) by Roberts himself, who signed off as 'a citizen of Portsmouth, in the State of New Hampshire, in the United States of America' and was dated 20 March 1833, the 57th year of America's independence. After weeks of consultation and working out the wording of the treaty, Roberts was able to leave with a copy that would later be ratified by his government. Having visited more temples than he had cared to visit, and studied the alligators and snakes of the river to the fullest extent, Roberts prepared for his own departure.

In his narrative Roberts recorded the final exchange of compliments and gifts between the Americans and the Siamese in a manner that once again accentuated the differences between the two nations, now about to become friends. To the king was presented the following: 'Five pairs of stone statues of men and women; some of the natural and some of the larger size, clothed in various costumes of the United States. Ten pair of vase lamps, of the largest size, plain glass. One pair of swords, with gold hilt and scabbards; the latter of gold, not gilt – shape of blade, a little curved'[38] Though he probably loathed to do so, Roberts was compelled to present the *Praklang* gifts as well, which included 'one mirror (or pair of mirrors), three cubits long by two broad, fixed in a stand, so as to form a screen; frame, carved and gilt; back, painted green. Soft, hairy carpeting, of certain dimensions; and some flower and fruit trees, planted, or in seed, with flower-pots.'[39] Though Roberts presented the *Praklang* some soft, fuzzy carpeting to do with as he wished, there was no fuzzy ambiguity in Roberts' own view of the Siamese as a whole; and he was not about to leave without having the final word. He noted that: 'Some presents of the productions of the country, were sent

38 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 319.

39 Ibid., p. 319.

to me, of very mean quality, and of inconsiderable value.[40] America and Siam were now on friendly terms, but in the eye of Edmund Roberts they *were not, and could never be*, equals.

From Siam Captain Geisinger directed the USS *Peacock* south, until she eventually reached Singapore. Roberts' first impression of Singapore was that it was a booming commercial centre that in so many ways showed just how far advanced British commercial interests had grown in the East Indies, and which demonstrated precisely why America needed to gain a foothold in the region as well.[41] His account of the American mission to Siam would later be compiled, edited and published, though Roberts himself would not live to see its publication – he would die of dysentery in Macao in 1836. But in so many ways his work gives us a vivid impression of the state of American naval power (or lack of it) in Southeast Asia at the time, and highlighted the precariousness of the American position in Asia which he lamented so.

3.IV The American eagle and the British lion: 'Frienemies' in the Indies

> It is, I think, an indisputable fact that Americans are, as Americans, the most self-conscious people in the world, and the most addicted to the belief that the other nations of the earth are in a conspiracy to undervalue them.[42]
>
> – Henry James, *Hawthorne*

As if having to deal with mosquitoes and procrastinating courtiers wasn't exhausting enough, Roberts had to cope with the British who were forever nearby, eagerly waiting for him to fumble.

The Americans were never really sure of their footing when it came to dealing with the British, and throughout the 1830s and 1840s the American

40 Ibid., p. 319.

41 Roberts wrote of Singapore thus: 'Singapore is merely a mart for the exchange of merchandise for the products of Europe, India, and China, the Indian Archipelago, and of the neighbouring states – the imports from one part forming the exports to another. [...] In the harbour, there may be frequently seen vessels from England, France, Holland, and other parts of Europe; from the Brazils, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, New South Wales; from Arabia, and various parts of British and Portuguese India; from Siam, the Malay peninsula, Camboja, and various ports in Cochin-China, from the gulf of Siam to the gulf of Tonquin, from Macao, and various parts of the provinces of Canton and Tokien' (Roberts, *Embassy*, pp. 323-324).

42 James, p. 154.

Resident based at Singapore – Joseph Balestier – would maintain his correspondence with his superiors in Washington, DC, keen to ensure that diplomatic relations between the two countries would remain cordial and that American vessels would not be prevented from conducting trade there.[43] Earlier in August 1825 the American vessel *Governor Endicott* was captured by the British warship HMS *Larne.* (No one had informed the British commander that the two countries were no longer at war, evidently.) Though the American vessel and its crew were later released, Hale notes that the arrest of the American vessel 'deterred American ships from venturing near Singapore for several years'.[44] On several occasions the British – arguably America's closest allies in the region – showed that they were not always reliable. Though American ships could dock and resupply at the posts that Britain controlled, the American Resident in Singapore was keen to see them open up their colonial markets to American goods like cotton and fabric, which he felt were better than those from Britain.[45]

Britain's arrival in Southeast Asia was, from the outset, an enterprise that brought it into conflict with the other European powers that were also encroaching upon Southeast Asia. The men of the East India Company, who were the architects of Britain's eventual conquest of Burma, the Malay Peninsula and the Straits Settlements regarded with an envious eye the goings-on in the other European colonies in the region, and there was certainly no love lost between the British and the Dutch, French and Spanish. America's belated arrival to Asia was treated with the same apprehension previously directed towards the Dutch East Indies Company and the French Compagnie des Indes; and though the War of 1812 was long over, the British were not about to facilitate America's entry into a part of Asia that they considered was theirs to conquer and rule. (America was then led by Andrew Jackson, who was hailed as the 'hero of the Battle of New Orleans' (1815), and who was well-known on both sides of the Atlantic for his Anglophobia.)

The British had reached Siam long before the Americans, and prior to the commencement of the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1826-1828, the East India Company-man John Crawfurd had courted the support of the Siamese for

43 Hale, pp. 23-24.

44 Hale, p. 7.

45 Just how successful American fabrics might have been in the Southeast Asian market is anyone's guess, but Zangger has noted how Swiss and German fabrics had proven remarkably popular among buyers in Singapore, the Malay Peninsula and Java. In the Dutch East Indies, Swiss printed cloth proved more popular than cloth of Dutch manufacture, despite the 12.5 per cent protective tariff that the Dutch authorities imposed on cloth imported from Switzerland and Germany (Zangger, p. 25).

the war effort.[46] Crawfurd's mission opened the way for another company man, Henry Burney, to formally engage with the Siamese and this led to the Siamese-British Burney Treaty of June 1826. Having established diplomatic and commercial links with Siam in 1826, the British were keen to make sure that their position at the Siamese court was not compromised by any other country.

It thus comes as no surprise that every slip or gaffe by the Americans was reported with a generous dose of schadenfreude by the British press. Roberts' failure to win over the support of the ruler of Cochinchina was reported in the English-language *Chronicle* of Singapore, and his dealings with the Siamese were studied in detail too by Englishmen who were on the lookout for any mistake the American envoy might make. The *Singapore Chronicle* reported that President Jackson's letter to the King of Siam was at first deemed a fake, and that the Siamese minister was reluctant to sign the duplicate copy of the Siamese-American Treaty, fearing that the Americans might then sell the document to another country.[47] The *Chronicle* gleefully went on to add that the Siamese hosts were unimpressed by the Roberts' gifts to the king, for 'they knew the presents were bought in China, which did not please them much'.[48]

Notwithstanding the somewhat childish bouts of one-upmanship between the British and the Americans, Roberts was keenly aware of how important his mission was, and the cost of failure. As if handling the Siamese wasn't complicated enough, he had to endure the taunts of the British who were, by then, firmly entrenched in their bases of Singapore, Malacca, Penang, the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts and Bengal; and who would have been quite happy to see the American envoy shown the door and booted out of Siam, and Southeast Asia, for good. (The British were particular relieved to learn that Roberts' request to have an American consul posted to Bangkok was refused by the *Praklang*, for their own request to have a British consul stationed there was likewise turned down.)[49]

46 Among the functionaries of the East India Company who were posted to Southeast Asia, John Crawfurd was one of the most active and certainly the most prolific. He was present during Britain's brief occupation of Java from 1811 to 1816, took part in the founding of Singapore, and was sent on several missions to Siam, Cochinchina and Burma. Crawfurd wrote several books on Southeast Asia, all of which showed his 'insider's perspective' as a member of the East India Company. See his *History*; *Journal* [...] *to the Court of Ava*; and *Journal* [...] *to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China*.

47 *Singapore Chronicle*, 3 March 1825, quoted in J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago, and Adjacent Countries* (Singapore, 1837), p. 203.

48 Ibid., p. 203.

49 Ibid., p. 204.

Roberts had another problem to deal with in Singapore, which surprisingly came from none other than the American Resident who had recently been posted there: Joseph Balestier. Balestier had developed a somewhat negative impression of Roberts thanks to the reports that he had received from French Catholic missionaries who had briefed him in Singapore, and who had informed him that the Cochinchinese were offended by Roberts' conduct in their country. Balestier was himself a self-made diplomat whose fortune was made from sugar plantations elsewhere, but he was convinced that he was the better man for the job and had written to Washington to offer his services as Roberts' replacement. Hale noted that 'nothing came out of this request',[50] and Balestier was hardly an expert in Southeast Asian matters himself, but that did not prevent Balestier from trying his luck whenever the opportunity arose.

The only thing that the Americans and British had in common, it seems, was an equal disdain for the Siamese, who, they regarded as feckless and unreliable. Like Roberts, the British press in Singapore held a dim view of political life in Siam. Although the *Singapore Chronicle* had noted that the climate of Bangkok was agreeable, and the commodities and foodstuffs were plentiful and cheap, it did go on to add that 'a European might be able to put up with such a country, but for a few material drawbacks – as for example no roads, or carriages – swarms of mosquitoes, and the ugly spectacle of a despotic government with its long train of evils and inconveniences'.[51] Of the conduct of the rulers of Siam towards other Asiatic nations, the *Chronicle* was dismissive and judgemental. In one of the reports of the *Singapore Chronicle* the reader is told of the fate of the ruler of Vientiane – Chao Anouvong – who was defeated, captured and handed over to Siam, and who suffered 'the greatest cruelties barbarism could invent'.[52]

That the British were contemptuous of the Siamese was evident even before Roberts reached the court of Siam. Britain's efforts to secure a working relationship with the Siamese had proven onerous, and the editors of the *Singapore Chronicle* had made their opinions with regards to the Siamese-British 1826 Treaty clear, opining that the conditions of the treaty would, in all probability, 'not be observed' by the Siamese.[53] Of the Siamese in general, the *Singapore Chronicle* was scathingly racist: 'The Siamese are, in reality, progressing a little towards civilization, and if they could only

50 Hale, p. 74.
51 *Singapore Chronicle*, 3 March 1825, p. 209.
52 Ibid., p. 200.
53 Ibid., p. 222.

be induced to believe that Siam is a paltry, insignificant nation, and the people themselves, poor ignorant creatures, only a degree above monkies [sic] – something might be made of them.'[54]

Regarding Asians as 'savages' and 'monkeys' was not, however, the sole monopoly of the British. The nineteenth century was a period when racialized colonial-capitalism worked hand-in-glove with a host of pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference and racial hierarchies, and racist attitudes towards Asians, Africans and Arabs were commonplace then.[55] Roberts' account of his brief stay in Siam, filled as it was with disparaging remarks about the Siamese and other Asians, was typical of the time; but yet different in some ways. For what distinguished his view of the Siamese from that of other Europeans was his republican ethos and Christian bias.

3.V Regarding the feeble, un-Christian Other: Oppositional dialectics in Roberts' narrative

> Americans have often seen themselves as a people apart. [...] [They] associated conventional dealings among nations with royalty and found them repugnant.[56]
>
> – George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*

Regarding the ethnic-cultural Other in the nineteenth century was often an act of epistemic violence, where the Other was often framed in terms that were decidedly negative. Stamford Raffles had written about the Javanese as a 'degenerate' people; John Crawfurd presented the Burmese as 'victims of Asiatic tyranny'; while James Brooke, Henry Keppel and Rodney Mundy depicted the peoples of Borneo as 'pirates and head-hunters'.[57] That the American Edmund Roberts could only see the Siamese in terms that were disparaging does not come as a wonder, for it has to be remembered that for all the talk of American freedom and equality that was being bandied about, the United States of America was still a republic where liberty extended only to the white population of the federation, and where slavery was commonplace in the antebellum South.

That Roberts' view of humanity was a segregated one, with races that were distinct and apart, was an attitude that was common at the time. And as

54 Ibid., p. 206.
55 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.
56 Herring, p. 3.
57 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

Guyatt has noted, racial segregation had always been a theme in American politics from the very founding of the country.[58] Though there were, at that time, leading American statesmen who were appalled by the realities of slavery – such as former President John Quincy Adams and future President Franklin Pierce – many of them placed greater emphasis on national unity, concerned that discussion on the future of slavery in America would tear the country asunder. As Guyatt has shown in his work, though Americans who opposed slavery did so on moral grounds, there were also many who did not believe that free black men and women could live together alongside whites. It would therefore be difficult to discount the fact that race – and theories of racial difference – played a part in America's dealings with other peoples, and how Americans viewed nations apart from their own, for as Herring has argued:

> Attitudes towards race reinforced this sense of cultural superiority. The United States came into existence as a slaveholding nation, and slavery exerted a potent impact on its foreign policy until its abolition after the Civil War. Slavery was supported by pseudo-scientific nineteenth century ideas about a hierarchy of race that assigned the top rank to white Anglo-Saxons and lower positions to other races based on darkness of skin colour. The Americans' views on race along with their sense of cultural superiority made it easy to justify expansion and empire. In their dealings with 'barbarous' Mediterranean and Malay 'pirates'; 'bigoted' and 'indolent' people of Spanish descent, and 'inscrutable' Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese, nineteenth-century Americans often adopted a high-handed approach based on a sense of racial superiority.[59]

Writing about the accounts that were left behind by Roberts and W.S.W. Ruschenberger (who would make a return journey in 1836, after Roberts had left), Stephen Young notes that Roberts' distaste for much of what he saw in Siam 'reveals the power of Calvinism' in his own mind.[60] Religion had shaped Roberts' worldview to such an extent that he could only see the world through the 'lenses of Christian manhood and righteousness'. And this partly explains his utter disgust when viewing the rituals of the Siamese as they paid homage to their superiors, and his inclination to remain among fellow like-minded American Christians – a propensity towards

58 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*.
59 Herring, p. 5.
60 Young, 'Edmund Roberts'.

seeking affirmation among the self-same that we also find in the work of other American writers of the time, Francis Warriner and Fitch W. Taylor.

Even more loathsome to Roberts was the spectacle of the Portuguese functionaries and interpreters – like Josef Piedade, the Portuguese master of the port of Bangkok – paying homage to the Siamese king, which struck him as a form of unmanly and un-Christian self-abasement. That the Portuguese Catholics had assimilated themselves into Siamese society was something that Roberts bemoaned, for it meant that their numbers had dwindled and their missionary efforts had come to naught.[61] Roberts' criticism was echoed by other American missionaries: The Princeton-educated Baptist Minister Howard Malcom shared his view that missionaries needed to be more active both in Southeast Asia and India, and to that end he wrote his own lengthy account in 1839 of the state of the mission stations he visited during his travels, focusing in particular on the state of missionary activism in Burma.[62]

The republican in Roberts makes his objections heard time and again throughout the narrative. In his earlier encounter with the Cochinchinese, he was offended by their preoccupation with titles and noble ranks (and equally offended when the Cochinchinese pointed out that the America they knew was a country that had no nobility at all). He refused to place himself in a situation where he – an American – was seen as somehow inferior or subordinate to the Cochinchinese, and he also refused to re-write the letter that President Jackson had sent to the court of Hue in a manner that implied that America and its President were inferior to the king of Cochinchina. So adamant was Roberts in his defence of his republican identity that he was prepared to terminate negotiations with Cochinchina, and concede that his mission was a failure. In the course of his stay in Siam Roberts had ample opportunity to complain about the feudal culture that he saw around him. Even when he and his fellow Americans were served by the servants who were sent by the king, Roberts noted that: 'The servants knelt down and presented [the offerings] in a more humble manner than suits our republican notions.'[63]

61 Roberts noted that 'the Catholic churches in this country, since the first bishop arrived, in 1662, have scarcely made any progress: the descendants of the Portuguese constitute, I may say with propriety, all the Christians in the kingdom; so say the Catholics themselves. All that can now be found here, and in the vicinity, do not exceed, according to the most zealous of that sect, thirteen hundred; but, according to a Protestant Christian missionary, who resided here nearly three years, and numbered them with considerable accuracy, they do not exceed four hundred. There are four churches in this vicinity; three of them are merely long sheds, in a wretched condition' (Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 278).

62 See Malcom.

63 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 235.

Servility was something that Roberts clearly detested, and he regarded it as something unmanly and antithetical to his own republican values. In the manner in which he associated servility with the Siamese (and other Asians), Roberts also foregrounded the cultural-civilizational divide between Westerners and Asiatics, and argued that the role of the former was to educate and civilize the latter. This dichotomy was made manifest several times in his work, as when he wrote that:

> A plain unmasked style, in speaking or writing, is totally unknown to a cringing people, born under a despotic government; but they are rapidly becoming wiser. Their intercourse with the English and Americans is gradually bringing about a more honest, *manly*, and open mode of expressing themselves, both in speaking and writing; but it can never be thoroughly effected under such a form of government as the present. The lower classes of the people are obliged to make use of gross flattery and adulation to their superiors, who again treat them as slaves, using high authoritative language. Subordination in rank is so strongly marked, that not the slightest appearance of equality is to be seen. They attach a ridiculous importance to mere form and ceremony. A Siamese, in the presence of a superior, either crouches to the ground, or walks with his body bent. It seems utterly impossible for him to sit or walk in an upright posture.[64]

Thus if Westerners had a role to play, it would be to bring about 'a more honest, manly and open' society in Asia, through their dealings with the locals – and this was a role that the Portuguese had abdicated, bringing shame to themselves, their country and their religion.

It was religion, and religious differences, that loomed even larger throughout Roberts' narrative. Long before the *Peacock* reached the city of Bangkok, Roberts' journey brought him to China. (Chapters 5 to 12 of his book are devoted to China.) And from the beginning of his account of the mission Roberts had already begun to note the distinction between his own Christian beliefs and that of the Confucianists and Buddhists. Writing to and for an American readership back home, Roberts invited his reader to consider:

> The abject condition of morals among the inhabitants of the Indian Ocean, which will naturally interest the philanthropist: while rejoicing in the high moral tone of society which distinguishes his own happy land, he

64 Ibid., p. 285. Emphasis mine.

> will look with an eye of compassion on those regions where the worship of the Supreme Being gives way to the mysterious idolatry of Budha [sic], or the external ceremonies of Confucius.[65]

Though he was supercilious towards Confucianism, it was Buddhism that stood out as the dialectical Other to Roberts' own beliefs. That he had little respect for Buddhism, and did not take it seriously as a belief-system, is evident in his writing. In Chapter 6 he wrote about the coming of Buddhism to China as if it was a do-it-yourself religion that was best suited for the indolent, superstitious and hypocritical:

> China wanted a creed that every man might understand; and the Buddhists provided the desideratum: accommodating their doctrines to all existing superstitions, they opened the door to every description of convert, who might retain as many of his old prejudices as he chose. They were not rigorous in enforcing the obligations of morality; to expiate sins, offerings to idols and priests were sufficient. A temple built in honour of any idol and richly endowed, would suffice to blot out any stain of guilt, and serve as a portal to the blessed mansions of Budha [sic]. When death approached, they promised each other their votaries, speedy promotion in the scale of metempsychosis until he should be absorbed in Nirupan or Nirvana – nonentity. With these prospects the poor deluded victim left the world. To facilitate his release from purgatory, the ghostly hypocrites said mass, and supplied the wants of the hungry departed spirit with rich offerings of food, of which the latter only enjoyed the odour, while the priests devoured the substance.[66]

Buddhists were, for Roberts, indolent and fatalistic, while Buddhist priests were 'a very despised class', who 'sprang from the lowest and most ignorant of the people'.[67] Later in the work Roberts offered his own account of the coming of Buddhism to Siam, and the manner in which it was practiced. As in the case of his account of Buddhism in China, his description of Buddhism in Siam was equally critical, and he argued that none of the precepts of Buddhism were adhered to by anyone in the kingdom.[68] With this as his

65 Ibid., p. 7.

66 Ibid., pp. 75-76.

67 Ibid., p. 77.

68 Roberts' account of the arrival of Buddhism in Siam and how it was practiced in real life read as follows: 'The Budhist [sic] religion of Siam, according to historians, originated in Magadha, the modern Behar, in the sixth century, (or 542,) the founder being Gautama, the son of a prince,

starting point, Roberts' account of the Siamese was consistently negative from beginning to end: The customs and manners of the Siamese – which he regarded as superfluous, ostentatious and obsequious – sprung, for him, from the wellspring of Buddhist scripture and belief. And such attitudes were not exclusively Roberts' either, for as Tocqueville had noted American society had always been religious and Christianity had always 'maintained a strong hold on the public mind in America'.[69] Roberts' Christian perspective was shared by the other American writer Francis Warriner, who likewise regarded Buddhism as 'deceitful idolatry'.[70]

It is interesting to note that Roberts' own aversion to Buddhist beliefs and religious praxis stood in contrast to the view held by the Europeans of his time, and this may perhaps point to the distinction between the Old World values of Europe and the new world values of the Americans. For Roberts clearly regarded Buddhist beliefs and culture as un-Christian and unmanly, while contemporary European writers – like Stamford Raffles, whose work *The History of Java* was published in 1817 – held the view that Buddhism (and Hinduism) were the cornerstones of Southeast Asian history and accounted for the greatness (by then lost) of Southeast Asian civilization. Raffles lamented the passing of Hinduism and Buddhism for he regarded the two belief systems as *essentially Asian*, and responsible for the development of the kingdoms of Mataram (eighth-tenth centuries) and Majapahit. But Roberts,

called *Sudhodana*. [...] All professors of Budhism [sic], whether of Tartary or Magadha origin, are atheists. They do not believe in one God, the creator of the universe. The leading doctrine of this religion, is that of the transmigration of souls. [...] The founder of this religion – seeing that all mankind was in a state of gross ignorance and barbarism, ferocious, their feet swift to shed blood, that they were given up to a life of rapine – persuaded them that it was a sin to shed the blood of any living creature; that they must cultivate the soil, and live in peace and harmony with all mankind.' But Roberts felt that the Buddhist commandments were hardly adhered to, for 'they are imperative on *Talapoys* [priests] only, and they do, or do not, observe them, as it suits their inclination' (Roberts, *Embassy*, pp. 295-297).

69 Tocqueville had noted that 'Christianity has therefore maintained a strong hold on the public mind in America; and, I would more particularly remark, its sway is not only that of a philosophical doctrine which has been adopted upon enquiry, but a religion which is believed without discussion' (pp. 4-5). Though he admired the manner in which the Americans had created a public domain where religion did not dictate the running of the state, the religious zeal that he saw in many ordinary Americans was for Tocqueville at times puritanical and excessive, and he later noted that 'religious insanity is very common in the United States' (p. 142).

70 Warriner also wrote about Buddhism in China, and included in his narrative an account of his meeting with the Chinese Christian convert Leang Afa, who had been introduced to him by the missionary Mister Bridgeman. Warriner's account of Leang Afa presented him as a repentant gambler, who had, since his conversion, renounced both gambling and Buddhism, having 'renounced the idolatry in which he had been educated, and the course of deception which he had practiced' (*Cruise*, pp. 203-204).

fixing his gaze on the goings-on in the immediate present, saw Buddhism in Siam as the cause of its degeneration instead. Raffles contrasted the lost glories of ancient Southeast Asia to the discoveries and achievements of modern-day colonial-capitalism; while Roberts contrasted the servility and docility of the Siamese to what he regarded as the muscular Christianity and republicanism of America and his fellow Americans. In both cases, Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians could only be understood as the Other to the Western Self – a constitutive Other perhaps, but a disabled Other nonetheless.

Though Roberts had been given the task of forging new relations with the kingdom of Siam, he did not forget – and did not allow his readers to forget – the fact that the kingdom he was dealing with was a non-Christian one, populated by a people who did not worship the same 'Supreme Being' as they did,[71] and that it was a land held together by a monarchical system that was in every respect the antithetical other to the American republic and its values.

3.VI Edmund Roberts as the American Orientalist

Roberts knew who his readers were; and despite his incessant griping and groaning, and the litany of complaints that accompanied his narrative; and the evil eye of the British who were eager to see him trip and fall, Edmund Roberts' mission to the kingdom of Siam was a success. He would go down in history as the first American envoy to negotiate a treaty with an independent kingdom in Southeast Asia, and by doing so bring America one step closer towards having a presence in the region. After his departure the American Protestant missionary Dan Beach Bradley (1804-1873) would arrive in Siam (in 1835), bringing with him a Singapore-made printing press and thus ushering the era of vernacular printing in the kingdom. The work that Roberts wrote and left behind – *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat* – was among the first of its kind, written by an American emissary to a foreign land for the purpose of educating his own countrymen about the norms and mores of a nation so far away – both geographically and culturally – from their own. His mission's destination was Southeast Asia, but his text was destined to be read by Americans back home.

The terms of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1833 (signed in 1836 and effective from 1837, the year of the publication of his book) proved in the

71 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 295.

long run to be beneficial to the United States, and was more comprehensive than the Anglo-Burmese Burney Treaty of 1826. Roberts had managed to obtain good terms for American merchants who would henceforth be able to conduct trade in the kingdom that irked him so; and in the future, after the reign of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), the coveted role of advisor on foreign affairs and relations would be reserved only for Americans. (So strong would American-Siamese relations develop in the years to come that even when Thailand declared war on the United States in 1942 the US government chose not to recognize the declaration.[72]) To Roberts' relief, his warnings about the dangers faced by American merchant vessels was heeded, and in 1835 the American East Indies Naval Squadron was formed, commanded by Commodore Edmund Kennedy (who had commanded the escort vessel USS *Enterprise* that accompanied Roberts' own ship to Southeast Asia three years earlier).

Unlike the commander and crew of the USS *Potomac*, whose mission to Sumatra would be met with scorn and suspicion back home in the United States, Roberts' mission on the USS *Peacock* would be met with praise and recognition. No controversy accompanied the three-year enterprise, and no scandals would follow in its wake. Roberts' only failure was to negotiate a treaty with the Cochinchinese, which in turn left Cochinchina open to European influence instead. Within a couple of decades after his departure it would be the French who would gain a foothold in that part of Southeast Asia, and America would only return to Indochina more than a century later. The French in turn were keen to protect their newfound colony from other Western competitors – including America; though it would be the *Japanese* who posed the real challenge. Japan had begun to rediscover Southeast Asia during the Tokugawa period and works such as the *Annan Kiryaku* (Description of Annam) by Kondo Morishige were influential, offering arguments for Japan to re-engage with Southeast Asians. During the Meiji era (1868-1912) the Iwakura delegation visited the European colonies of Southeast Asia, as Japan learned the ways of Western modernity (which included the modalities of colonial rule). Influential thinkers like Okuma Shigenobu and Inukai Tsuyoshi called for closer dialogue with native leaders in Indochina and the Philippines as anti-Western sentiment in Japan grew, and Japanese nationalists began debating the idea of an Asian resurgence. Japan actively offered its help to Siam, playing the role of an Asian ally that was willing to help Siam modernize and retain its independence from the West; while in Indochina the Japanese were actively supporting anti-colonial movements

72 Weatherbee, p. xxii.

in Vietnam and Laos between the 1880s to 1890s. The Japanese army had begun mapping parts of Southeast Asia and were able to produce detailed maps of French Indochina,[73] and Japanese agents like Hikita Toshiaki and Iwamoto Chitsuna were active in Vietnam and Laos, respectively. While all of this was happening, America was still a distant country with no colony of its own in the East Indies.[74]

During Roberts' time there was little inkling of Japan's coming rise to prominence and the role that it would play in Southeast Asia in the future. Decades after Roberts' departure Townsend Harris – then appointed American Consul General to Japan – would further bolster American-Siamese relations with another treaty, the Harris Treaty of 1856. With that came the appointment of Stephen Matoon as the first American Consul to Siam.

Apart from the treaty that bore his name, Roberts also left behind one other thing behind: his book. His work tells us something about the Siamese world that he visited then, and gives us a vivid picture of courtly life and religious praxis in Siam in the early nineteenth century. In this respect Roberts' work belonged to the same category of American travel writings that includes the work of writers like Warriner and Reynolds that we have looked at in the previous chapter. Roberts' own contribution to America's budding knowledge of Southeast Asia also set the tone for many other works of a similar kind that would be written much later such as Anna Leonowens' *An English Governess at the Court of Siam* (1870) and *The Romance of the Siamese Harem* (1872),[75] and which would frame Siam – and Southeast Asia by extension – as the land of the strange and exotic Other. In the same way that Raffles' *History of Java* (1817) and Crawfurd's *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* (1829) betrayed the Anglocentric leanings and prejudices of the authors, so does Roberts' work reveal as much about the man who wrote it.

Readers who are familiar with Crawfurd's *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* would be able to see striking parallels in the work of Roberts too: Both men were sent on diplomatic missions to secure lasting treaties, both men travelled upriver to their appointed destinations. For both Crawfurd and Roberts, any and every attempt by the locals – Burmese and Siamese – to delay negotiations was

73 See: *Indochina Country Map: Southeast Area*. Geographical and Mapping Bureau of the Japanese Army, Tokyo, 1896. YG827- 427/428/429/430. Four maps of Indochina, with Katakana phonetic script and Chinese script. Map room, Diet Library, Tokyo, Japan.

74 See Shiro.

75 Noor, 'Innocents Abroad?'; and Donaldson.

seen as proof of native indolence, and every attempt to secure a better deal for the Burmese and Siamese was presented as proof of an unscrupulous, manipulative character. Both authors presented an unflattering portrait of their hosts as Asiatics who were so culturally determined that they were bereft of agency and free will. At no point does either one of the authors entertain the possibility that the Burmese and Siamese were engaged in politics with the guests, and trying their rational best to serve the interest of their respective nations – as the Americans and British themselves were wont to do.

There is, however, one key difference between the writing of Roberts and John Crawfurd, and that is that Roberts was a republican who bowed before no king. Crawfurd's work was dedicated to his ruler, King George IV – 'Sovereign of the greatest of free nations'[76] – while Roberts' work was dedicated to his friend Levi Woodbury, who was a fellow American citizen. Writing for the benefit of his fellow Americans, Roberts was keen to impress upon them the need for their republic to cultivate ties and alliances with other nations in the world so that their republic would thrive and endure. He gained no personal profit from his mission – indeed he was destined to die soon after the expedition – but his labour was for the sake of a young republic that was beginning to set its eyes on Asia. And it was there, amidst the alligators and snakes, courtiers and black-toothed women of mainland Southeast Asia, that his own sense of identity as an American grew more pronounced. By the time Roberts was on his way to Southeast Asia, the country he left was already on the path of a new kind of internationalism that was encapsulated in the philosophy of the 'Young America' movement, which would be supported by statesmen and intellectuals alike.[77]

In the language-game of America's defenders of free trade, the commercial empire they hoped to build was the embodiment of the 'empire of liberty' that would unshackle the economies of the world, unlock the potential of dormant communities and open the minds of peoples the world over. In

76 Crawfurd, *Journal* [...] *to the Court of Ava*, p. i.

77 By the middle of the nineteenth century there emerged on both sides of the Atlantic new social movements calling for socio-economic and political reform. In Europe the call for renewal and reform came in the form of movements such as the Junges Deutschland (Young Germany) and the Junghegelianer (Young Hegelians) led by the likes of David Strauss against the reactionary forces of the established elite, embodied by rulers such as King Friedrich Wilhelm IV (r. 1840-1861). The same desire for reform, accompanied by an equally fervent desire to oppose all kinds of feudalism and aristocracy, was taken up by American intellectuals, writers and politicians such as John O'Sullivan and the Democrats James K. Polk and Franklin Pierce, who were part of the so-called Young Democrats or Young America movement. See Eyal.

time the lofty ideal of such an 'empire of liberty' would be bolstered by the very real presence of American warships that would venture further to Asia, and protect American interests there.[78] Central to this grand narrative was the pivotal role that American was meant to play, as a liberal and liberating nation that maintained its leverage over others by virtue of its republican virtues and religious values. American Orientalism was thus defined by the parameters set by republicanism and the Protestant work ethic, lending it a character that was somewhat different from the Orientalism that would develop in the Old World of continental Europe. Edmund Roberts' brand of American Orientalism pushed against the barrier of neutrality and non-intervention, and despite his disdain for the cultural practices of the Southeast Asians he met, he maintained that America was a country that would not intervene in the affairs of others. He had come to Southeast Asia and done his part, but in the years to come there would be other Americans for whom the temptation to intervene would prove too great to bear.

78 Hale notes that by the late 1830s and throughout the 1840s the number of American warships that were travelling to and through Southeast Asia was growing. Records that were kept by the American Resident at Singapore then noted the names of the following American naval vessels that docked at Singapore between 1833 to 1849:
1839: USS *Columbia*, commanded by Commodore Read
1839: USS *John Adams*, commanded by Captain Wyman
1841: USS *Constitution*, commanded by Captain Kearny
1842: USS *Porpoise*, commanded by Captain Reingold
1842: USS *Oregon*, commanded by Captain Carr
1842: USS *Flying Fish*, commanded by Captain Knox
1842: USS *Vincennes*, commanded by Captain Wilkes
1845: USS *Constitution*, commanded by Captain Percival
Though there were more American warships in Southeast Asian waters by then, the American Resident in Singapore Joseph Balestier was not very pleased, for he was certain that America's economic and political interests were better served by special agents such as himself (Hale, pp. 336-342).

4 'It was a scene of grandeur in destruction'

Fitch W. Taylor and America's second attack on Sumatra in 1838

Colonel Kilgore: *I love the smell of napalm in the morning. That gasoline smell ... it smells like ... victory.*
– *Apocalypse Now*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola

When one looks upon this beautiful island [...] one could wish that it were in the hands of an American colony, and its resources developed by American industry.[1]
– Fitch W. Taylor, *Voyage around the World*

4.I Boom! Back to Sumatra we go

'What a rush there will be for the hen-roost' added a third gentleman, with a little spice of an epicurean in his nature, 'when we have frightened the Malays from their bamboo palaces!'[2]
– Fitch W. Taylor, *Voyage around the World*

America's second attack on Sumatra has been dubbed by some as 'the Second Sumatran Expedition', though the title is somewhat misleading. In late December 1838 there was indeed a second gunboat action in Sumatra, this time performed by the American frigate USS *Columbia* and the sloop-of-war USS *John Adams*, but the ships had not been ordered to Sumatra on a punitive mission. No orders were sent to Commodore Read from high above, there was no directive from President Martin Van Buren (1837-1841) or command from the naval department; and in the wake of the second attack on Sumatra there would be less fanfare and controversy. But the attacks that took place in 1838 would be remembered thanks to the labours of the Chaplain to the American squadron, Fitch Waterman Taylor, who penned his account of the mission in detail and published it under the somewhat wordy title *The Flag Ship, or, A Voyage around the World in the United States Frigate* Columbia*; Attended by Her Sloop of War* John Adams*, and Bearing the Broad Pennant*

1 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 279.
2 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 264.

of Commodore George C. Read, in 1840.[3] (In the same year another account of the voyage was published by William Meacham Murrell, too.[4])

America was then under the leadership of its eighth President, the Democrat Martin Van Buren (1837-1841), who had come into office promising to keep alive the legacy of Andrew Jackson but who was almost immediately faced with an economic crisis of massive proportions.[5] He was known for his Jacksonian sympathies, and as far as national politics was concerned was a pragmatist when it came to keeping America's states in the federal fold. To that end he did not publicly oppose slavery or alienate the Southern states with the threat of abolition. America had normalized relations with Britain and the other countries of Europe, and was extending its diplomatic feelers to other non-European powers such as the Ottoman Empire; and like his predecessors Van Buren saw that Asia was the new land of opportunity and wanted to promote American commerce in the East as well.

American ships had been travelling to Southeast Asia with some regularity, and the after the First Sumatran Expedition of 1832 there had been no reports of any major attacks on American shipping in the East Indies. As we have seen in the previous chapter American envoys and agents like Edmund Roberts and Joseph Balestier had been despatched to that part of Asia to seek new allies for America as well, and in Roberts' case the effort proved to be worthwhile thanks to the signing of the first treaty with Siam. Few could have anticipated that an American vessel might be attacked again – at the same location, to boot – in 1838; and it was the attack on the *Eclipse* that would culminate in America's second gunboat action off the coast of Sumatra, that was documented in detail by Taylor. Fitch W. Taylor's two-volume account would be compiled and published in the form of one large book; and in it the attack on the settlements of Kuala Batu and Muckie (Meukek[6]) would feature as one episode among others – though

3 The first edition of Taylor's work, *The Flag Ship, or, A Voyage around the World in the United States Frigate* Columbia*; Attended by Her Sloop of War* John Adams*, and Bearing the Broad Pennant of Commodore George C. Read*, was published by D. Appleton and Co. in New York in 1840. A second edition – with two volumes bound in one – was published under the slightly different title: *A Voyage round the World in the United States Frigate* Columbia*; Attended by Her Consort the Sloop of War* John Adams*, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read*, by H. Mansfield in New Haven and D. Appleton and Co. in New York in 1842. (All quotations here are from the second 1842 edition of Taylor's work.)

4 See Murrell.

5 See Cole.

6 For the sake of consistency I shall be using the Indonesian spelling of the place-name Meukek from now on.

it was deemed important enough to get an engraving of its own, which features as the frontispiece of the work (alongside a coloured engraving of the emperor of China, no less).

Born in 1803, Fitch W. Taylor hailed from Connecticut and was the only son of Colonel Jeremiah Taylor. Leaving the comfort of East Hampton he made his way to New York City in his mid-teens, but before he was twenty felt himself drawn to the Church. To that end he redirected himself to the study of scripture which he did at Yale University, graduating in 1828 at the age of twenty-five. He was given the Maryland Episcopal Diocese as his first charge, but Taylor's first true love was the sea and the opportunity to see the world and cross the seven seas proved too alluring, notwithstanding the deprivations he would have to endure. He was in many ways a man of his time, and like Reynolds and Warriner whose works we have looked at earlier was in an advantageous position where he could accompany the American vessels and write about their exploits as an interested participant-observer.

Taylor was appointed as the chaplain to the American squadron, and this gave him ample opportunity to record the goings-on on board the USS *Columbia* is some detail. Less inclined towards the world of politics, he was partial to his creature comforts: He liked his cabin very much, noting that it was well decorated and constantly supplied with cakes and pickles.[7] Elsewhere he also expressed his approval of the French china and silver cutlery aboard the frigate.[8] (Though not everyone was as easily pleased like Taylor: Hale records that when the American Resident of Singapore Joseph Balestier boarded the American warship the USS *Plymouth* in February 1850 he was appalled by the diminutive size of his cabin quarters, and the fact that he had to share the toilet with the Captain and ship's Chaplain. Whether Taylor had his own toilet to himself, however, was not mentioned in his work.[9]) For a man of the cloth Taylor's work is quite informative, and would be of interest to landlubbers who have never been anywhere near a sailing ship. He constantly returned to the vessel he was on, and explained its workings to his readers – such as the procedure of beating to general quarters[10], the drill when rescuing a man who had fallen overboard,[11] medical care for those who were ill (including himself),[12]

7 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 8.
8 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 20.
9 Hale, p. 305.
10 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, pp. 91-93.
11 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 103-104.
12 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 131-132.

navigating a frigate through a gale,[13] and even the types of clouds that can be seen at sea.[14]

Overall command of the squadron was given to Commodore George Campbell Read, who was captain of the frigate USS *Columbia*, while the sloop-of-war *John Adams* was commanded by Captain Thomas W. Wyman. The frigate had a crew of 500 men, of whom 60 were marines. Taylor noted that discipline was harsh aboard the vessel, and the punishment for wearing unpolished shoes was six lashes at the gangway.[15] Notwithstanding the violent punishments that were meted out on a fairly regular basis, the journey began pleasant enough, at least for Taylor. As Chaplain on board the frigate he was spared the tiresome, and at times dangerous, duties of the sailors; and was often in the company of the officers instead, stationed at the quarterdeck at the stern. At the start of his narrative he recounts the jovial mood among the officers dining at the Captain's table, and at one point recounted a joke told by one of the lieutenants: '"I tell you what – if you would kill an Indian, you must proceed in the manner of killing a dolphin." – "How is that?" the others asked. "Why, catch him first!"'[16]

Such 'innocent occasions for creating a smile' were recorded by the all-seeing Taylor and penned by him later, though the reader is left wondering if such jokes would have been equally appreciated by Native Americans then and now. The narrative proceeds along the course set by the squadron, and Taylor recorded the events of the journey as the *Columbia* and *John Adams* set off from Hampton Roads to Madeira,[17] then Rio, crossed the Atlantic, passed the Cape of Good Hope (on 19 August 1838), Muscat (18 October 1838), reached Bombay and then moved on to Goa and then Ceylon. It was at Colombo, Ceylon, that news of the attack on the American barque the *Eclipse* was received, along with the report that its commander, Captain Wilkins, and several members of its crew had been killed in Sumatra.[18] The news had been sent out earlier on 12 October 1838 by the American Consular Agent J. Reverly, who was based at Georgetown, Penang.[19] (John Reverly had been appointed as the American Consular Agent in Penang

13 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 134-135.

14 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 142-146.

15 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 14.

16 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 14.

17 Just before reaching Madeira the USS *Columbia* suffered its first fatal accident: A sailor fell from the top-gallant yard and met his untimely end (ibid., vol. 1, p. 27).

18 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 255-257.

19 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 254.

by the American Resident in Singapore, Joseph Balestier.[20]) By the time the news reached Commodore Read it was already somewhat dated. Upon receiving this information the Americans reacted accordingly, and it was only *then* that Commodore Read directed the squadron to Sumatra, to investigate what had really happened, and to offer some form of retribution. (Here it is important to emphasize yet again that Commodore Read and the other senior officers of the two American warships had received news of the attack on the *Eclipse* while they were already at sea, and a long way away from home. Thus, unlike the case of the First Sumatran Expedition that had been directed by President Jackson and the US Navy, the *Columbia* and *John Adams* were operating on their own, under the direction of the Commodore himself.)

As the squadron made its way to Sumatra, Taylor noted that the crew of the frigate had begun preparing themselves for the fighting that lay ahead of them: 'The ship's crew, in their different divisions, have been grinding their cutlasses, battle-axes, pikes, and putting their guns and pistols in order, for immediate use'.[21] Taylor was in no doubt that the officers and men of the squadron would do their duty, and in the course of doing so there would be 'no lack of recklessness and courage' among any of them; but he placed his trust in God above all, and hoped that 'in all that related to the circumstances of these miserable people, and the safety of our own officers and men, may a merciful as well as a just God direct'.[22] By the time that the squadron reached Kuala Batu (on 23 December 1838), intelligence was received that the people of Meukek were also implicated in the attack on the *Eclipse*.[23]

Taylor recorded that as the squadron reached Kuala Batu provisions on board the *Columbia* were about to run out. The men complained that the stock of American-made sea biscuits was gone, and that the quality of provisions that were procured at Bombay was of inferior quality. On the eve of the engagement at Kuala Batu the officers of the *Columbia* were wont to engage in friendly banter, but were cognisant of the risk involved: They discussed the Dutch operations against Kuala Batu, and noted that the Dutch had lost around 70 men in their previous assault.[24] Unlike the earlier attack by the USS *Potomac* during the First Sumatran Expedition,

20 Hale, p. 84.
21 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 261.
22 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 262.
23 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 263.
24 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 266.

the element of surprise was gone. The arrival of two American warships at the same time meant that it was impossible to disguise the vessels or the intention of their commanders. It was the timely arrival of Po' Adam – who years earlier had played a role in the rescue of the American crew of the *Friendship* – that tipped the balance for the Americans,[25] for it was he who confirmed that the men guilty of attacking the *Eclipse* and killing her captain were then at Kuala Batu, as well as Meukek.[26] Taylor had heard of Po' Adam before, for 'the name of this man has been favourably heard of, as the one who rendered assistance to Captain Endicott and the crew of the *Friendship*'.[27] But it is telling that Taylor did not care much for Po' Adam, or Malays in general, for he later added that:

> The story is told in the narrative of the voyage of the *Potomac*, so as to produce a favourable impression of this trusty Malay, if the word *trusty, in any one instance, can be applied, with propriety, of one of a notoriously treacherous people*.[28]

But it was the intervention of Po' Adam that stalled the attack on Kuala Batu, and the following morning Commodore Read ordered a boat to be sent ashore, to begin discussions with the Rajah instead. Lieutenants Parmer and Pennock, along with Lieutenant Baker of the Marines, were sent ashore in the company of Po' Adam. The Rajah of Kuala Batu professed his innocence, claiming that he had not ordered the attack on the *Eclipse* and had no dealings with those responsible. A second talk with the Rajah followed, this time with Captain Wyman of the sloop-of-war *John Adams*.[29] The discussions proved unsuccessful, for the Rajah was unable to find the men responsible for the attack on the American barque and it was clear that the money stolen from the American ship had been shared by the people of the settlement. For Taylor, this was damning evidence that implicated the *entire* settlement of Kuala Batu, including its chief. At one stage Taylor noted that the son-in-law of the Rajah – Po Nyah-heit – appeared willing to switch sides and offer his help to the Americans, in return for their support for his claim to chieftainship.

In the midst of all these negotiations and intrigue, Taylor took a moment to appreciate the scenery around him, and noted that Sumatra was indeed

25 Reynolds, *Voyage*, pp. 98, 123-124.
26 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 267-268.
27 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 268.
28 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 268. Emphasis mine.
29 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 272.

a beautiful country; and that 'one could wish that it were in the hands of an American colony, and its resources developed by American industry'.[30] But he then added that this was not the *American* way, and they would not consent to such a proposal, for: 'Unlike the policy of other nations, ours is not to interfere with the petty contentions, or larger broils, of a different people.'[31]

Having noted that meddling in the affairs of other nations was not the American way, Taylor then duly recounted the American bombardment of Kuala Batu. For him the bombing of the settlement was an instance of America expressing 'just displeasure' at the conduct of the ruler and his people, and was an episode that was positively *thrilling*:

> The *thrilling excitement* now felt was not from fear, for there was nothing to be apprehended, though it was expected that the Rajah's forts might open fire upon us. *But it was the idea, that our own shot would be sending these miserable people into another world, and crumbling upon their heads the dwellings they inhabited*.[32]

The *Columbia* and *John Adams* commenced firing shortly after the officers had finished their breakfast dessert, and in the space of half an hour Kuala Batu was blasted to smithereens.[33] Taylor noted that it was the day after Christmas, and that a year ago he was back home in America, standing upon the pulpit and looking down upon his congregation, whose 'eyes were fixed, as they listened to the word of God'.[34] On that day however he and the crew of the *Columbia* were standing on the deck of the frigate, their eyes fixed on the spectacle of the Sumatran settlement that had been bombarded by two ships of the American Navy.

Though America was not at war with the settlement of Kuala Batu, by this stage it was clear that the *Columbia* and *John Adams* were on a punitive mission, as there was no resolution of any kind that was reached. Commodore Read then directed both ships to their next target – the settlement of Meukek – on 28 December. Once again the Americans demanded that

30 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 279.

31 Taylor noted that there were, in fact two rulers of Kuala Batu: Po Chute-Abdullah, who ruled over the Acehnese community, and Po Kwala, who ruled over the Pedir community. Complicating matters further was the fact that Po Nyah-heit, son-in-law of the Pedir ruler, was also contending for the coveted role of chief of the settlement (ibid., vol. 1, p. 279).

32 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 281-282. Emphasis mine.

33 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 282-283.

34 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 283.

the Sumatrans surrender the men who were responsible for the attack on the *Eclipse* – and by then it was discovered that the leader of the raiding party was an individual named 'Lubby Sammon'.[35] Though the ships were on high alert, and violence seemed both inevitable and close, Taylor's narrative lapsed to a different register altogether when he recounts his receipt of some correspondence from America, which 'seemed as if some mystic hand, unseen, but ever ready to serve me with acts of kindness' had intervened in his private affairs.[36]

The hand of Providence did not, however, spare the settlement of Meukek that was bombarded by the squadron the very next day (1 January 1839). By Taylor's account the attack on Muckie was even more ferocious than the assault on Kuala Batu. Watching the attack 'with excited interest' he recorded that the cannonade was 'almost unbroken', and that every type of ammunition was used – round, canister and grape-shot.[37] Then came the landing and assault on the settlement itself, which was carried out by 250 men on a launch and four cutters from the *Columbia* and five other boats from the *John Adams*. Before the landing commenced, Commodore Read spoke to the sailors and marines thus:

> 'You have been desirous,' he said, 'to have an opportunity to land, on an expedition like the one which is now offered to you. I have the fullest confidence in your success. *Burn and destroy the town, and put to death all men whom you may find bearing arms*; and by no means injure the unarmed and the yielding.'[38]

The Commodore's warning that unarmed civilians were not to be harmed was perhaps a residual reminder of the scandal that erupted in the wake of the First Sumatran Expedition, where Commodore Downes and his men had been vilified in the American press as the murderers of women and children. Commodore Read was careful not to repeat a similar debacle, but in the event the inhabitants of Meukek had fled in the face of the bombardment, though the troops that landed nonetheless set the town on fire. More than a century before America's involvement in Vietnam, when the term 'search and destroy' was used to describe their operations there, the marines and sailors of the American squadron were doing precisely that in the Sumatran

35 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 286.
36 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 288.
37 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 291.
38 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 292. Emphasis mine.

settlement of Meukek. Every single house was burned down, 'the light and dry bamboo buildings burned like stubble'; all five forts were destroyed and the guns spiked.[39] At the end of the assault the bugler played 'Yankee Doodle', and the men returned to their ships after the town had been totally destroyed. Captain Wyman reported that not a single American soldier had been killed or wounded, but his report was silent on how many civilians may have been killed by the guns of the ships, and Taylor took no note of it either. (In fact, more American sailors died from disease than combat throughout the journey: On the way from Sumatra to Singapore two crewmen died of dysentery, and on the next leg of the journey from Singapore to Macao another seven died of the same.[40])

Following the destruction of Meukek, the squadron then proceeded to Soo-Soo, where Commodore Read was able to secure a promise from Rajah Po Chute Abdullah and the other chiefs of Soo-Soo that the sum of 1,000 dollars – that was taken from the American vessel *Eclipse* – would be repaid to the American government, under threat of further reprisal in the future.[41] Later Po Kwala, the Pedir chief of Kuala Batu, would likewise agree to a new agreement with the Americans, with Taylor as one of the witnesses to its signing.[42]

Following the bombardment of Kuala Batu and Meukek, the squadron headed to Penang and then onward to Singapore. The second volume of Taylor's work recounts the homeward journey of the American squadron, as it sailed to Penang, Singapore and then on to Portuguese-held Macao. Taylor noted that the arrival of the American squadron came as a relief to the Portuguese and other Europeans at Macao, as there had been trouble reported between the Chinese and all Westerners there.[43] There they received news that the Americans and British at Canton were held prisoners, and that the Chinese 'lower classes' were inclined to massacre the 'foreign devils' in their country.[44] Despite the tense mood about the place, Taylor indulged in his interest in Christian graveyards (as he did while in Madeira), and chanced upon the grave of Edmund Roberts, whose mission to Cochinchina and Siam we have looked at earlier.[45] At Canton he made

39 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 295.
40 Hale, p. 109.
41 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, pp. 299-302, 303-304.
42 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 315.
43 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 87.
44 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 88, 112-115.
45 Edmund Roberts' gravestone read: 'The Remains of Edmund Roberts, Esq, Special Diplomatic Agent of the United States to several Asiatic Courts, who died in Macao, June 12 1836, aged 50.

several observations on the subject of Chinese culture and beliefs, and was dismissive of both Confucianism and Buddhism as we shall see later. The squadron then crossed the Pacific, stopped at Honolulu and the Sandwich Islands, then on to Tahiti (in December 1839), before reaching Valparaiso, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro and finally home.

Unlike the First Sumatran Expedition, which had been the cause of some uproar back in the United States, the attacks on Kuala Batu and Meukek by the USS *Columbia* and USS *John Adams* in 1838-1839 did not trigger a similar reaction. President Martin Van Buren was never called upon to explain why the American squadron had chosen to do what it did (for he never ordered them to do anything), and Commodore Read was never asked to explain the decisions he made or the orders he gave. Unlike Commodore Downes, whose fate was sealed after his Sumatran expedition, Commodore Read would continue to serve in the United States Navy for decades to come. He would later assume command of the American African Squadron, and then the American Mediterranean Squadron, and be promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral shortly before his death in 1862.

The destruction of Meukek and Kuala Batu received relatively little mention in the European press as well, as the other European powers were busy with the task of empire-building and occupied by their own bloody battles abroad: Between 1839 to 1842 Britain was caught up with the First Anglo-Afghan War, as the British government tried to prevent the Russian Empire from extending its influence into Central Asia. (Several British leaders, like Benjamin Disraeli, regarded the Afghan War as a futile effort, and were appalled by the enormous losses that were sustained by British forces.) Britain's power in the Indian subcontinent was expanded ever further following the First and Second Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-1846 and 1848-1849 in the Punjab, and eventually Britain became the dominant power across India, closing it off to other competing Western powers, including the United States.[46]

The Sumatra incident might have been forgotten altogether, had it not been for the works of Fitch W. Taylor and William Murrell, which were both published in 1840. But of the two works that were later published, it was Taylor's account that is more interesting, for it reveals a lot about how Americans viewed Southeast Asia then, and how America's identity was then framed against a constitutive Other.

He devised and executed to their end, under the instructions from his Government, Treaties of Amity and Commerce between the U.S. and the courts of Muscat and Siam' (Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 2, p. 99).

46 See James.

4.II 'May a merciful as well as a just God direct': Fitch W. Taylor's Christian universe

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
And the shadows of the night,
Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy
On a crocodile rode by.[47]
– Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Masque of Anarchy'

Fitch Waterman Taylor was a Chaplain of the Episcopal Church, and like his fellow American traveller-author Francis Warriner whose work we have looked at earlier, his work was deeply and obviously influenced by his personal religious beliefs. From the beginning to the end of the voyage, we get a glimpse of Taylor's moral-religious universe, which was thoroughly Protestant in nature. Like Warriner, Taylor too saw the hand of God in everything and everywhere (including in the mail that he received, delivered by some 'mystic hand'); and in his dealings with other human beings ranked them according to a hierarchy of human worth that was determined by their respective religious beliefs and value-systems.

But unlike Warriner, whose faith nudged him in the direction of a more inclusive universalism and common humanity, Taylor's religiosity was one that blinkered his view of other cultures and societies that were different to his own – very much like Edmund Roberts, whose view of Buddhists and Confucianists was decidedly negative. Like Roberts, Taylor was more inclined to keep to the company of those he knew and was comfortable with: His social world was ordered in terms of concentric circles of familiarity and friendship. He was happiest among his fellow American Protestants, such as the American delegation he met at Rio.[48] Next came Englishmen – like the crew of the British ship HMS *Stag* and their English Chaplain, and the English officials he met in India, Penang, Singapore and Macao, who were also Protestants like him,[49] for he remarked that 'all Englishmen, and certainly all English women, are not prejudiced against the United States'.[50]

Beyond the pale of his Anglo-American Protestant world were the other Europeans, some of whom had the misfortune of being Catholic, and were

47 Shelley, p. 4.
48 Taylor *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, pp. 115-116.
49 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 115, 121-125.
50 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 121.

thus considered by him as borderline cases.[51] Taylor's misgivings about Catholicism were laid bare quite early in the text, as the USS *Columbia* reached Madeira and Rio. Taylor stated that he had 'no heart to upbraid the Roman Catholics', but did so anyway immediately afterwards.[52] At Madeira he paid a visit to 'their dismantled cathedrals and decaying halls'[53] and listened to 'their venerated, but superstitious, and, *as a Protestant*, I think, very often puerile worship'.[54] He lamented 'the foolish accomplishments' of Catholicism, which for him included 'monkish celibacy'; and though he found the nuns of the Convent of Santa Clara pleasant enough, he did not veer from his Episcopalian convictions and regarded their rites and rituals as obscure.[55]

But it wasn't just the superstitions and rituals of the Catholics that Taylor bemoaned, but also what he regarded as their fanaticism and the 'infuriated zealots' among them, for the histories of Spain and Portugal were to him 'written in blood'.[56] Portuguese and Spanish Catholicism was for Taylor antiquated and outdated, and 'the power of the Papal hierarchy has been paralyzed by the advance of more enlightened public sentiment, and truer philosophy than that of earlier ages'.[57] (Whether Taylor felt that American republicanism was a truer philosophy was left unstated.) The manner in which Taylor admonishes the Spanish and Portuguese – for their superstitions, their obscurantism and for allowing their religious institutions to fall into disrepair – reminds us of the views of that other American critic of continental Europeans, Edmund Roberts, whose work we looked at earlier. Roberts had criticized the Portuguese Catholics in Siam for being idle and allowing their missions to decay,[58] and Taylor was making pretty much the same accusation in his treatment of the Portuguese in Brazil. The only place that Taylor found interesting in Portuguese Madeira was the English graveyard, where he was once again in the company of fellow English-speakers, albeit dead ones. It was there that he chanced upon the

51 Taylor would write that 'if Christians shall all be with Christ, then they, by consequence, will be with each other' (ibid., p. 89). But despite his occasional concessions to Christian universalism, he could not help but note and highlight the differences between Protestants and Catholics, time and again.

52 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 46-47, 49-53, 55-61.

53 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 46.

54 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 46.

55 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 50-54.

56 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 47.

57 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 47.

58 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 270.

grave of an Englishman from Cambridge named Farish, who obviously never made it back home.[59]

There were, however, moments in his narrative when Taylor's jaundiced view of Catholicism seemed linked to, and influenced by, his apparent distrust and dislike of continental Europeans – Portuguese and Spanish, in particular. His disparaging comments about some of the seedier quarters of Rio seem to be based less on his religious beliefs, but more on his attitudes towards some Europeans (apart from the English, who were the only Europeans he liked). And later while in Goa – where he momentarily panicked as he feared that he had been abandoned by the USS *Columbia* – he worked himself up to a frenzy, believing that the tea that had been served to him by his Portuguese hosts was poisoned.[60] Taylor's partiality to England and the English would be demonstrated again on the journey home to America, when during his brief stay in Portuguese-held Macao he stated in the clearest terms his preference for the company of Englishmen rather than the Portuguese, for 'surely there are interests enough that are mutual in the common welfare of England and America'.[61]

Taylor's capacity to deal with alterity and difference was tested further as the USS *Columbia* sailed past the Cape of Good Hope, and reached Muscat. Commodore Read met with the ruler of Muscat, Sultan Syed Sayeed Soultan[62]; while Taylor tried his luck by asking if the Sultan would allow American missionaries to work there. The answer he was given was straight to the point: "That would be impossible, for a missionary would not make a Mohammedan a Christian"; and should such a thing occur, "his highness, the true Imam, would kill him" he was told.[63]

But it was when the *Columbia* reached Bombay that Taylor truly felt that he had arrived in the Orient. His initial impression of Bombay was overwhelming, as he noted how he was overcome by 'the sights and sounds of the ever-changing vision of a phantasmagoria before my view'.[64] At Bombay Taylor clung on to whatever symbol of British imperial power he could see, seeking whatever traces of 'England abroad' that he could find; for he was unable to fathom and digest all that was unfamiliar around him:

59 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 62. The Englishman's name was in fact Geoffrey Farish.
60 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 237-238.
61 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 105.
62 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 166-168.
63 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 176.
64 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 195.

> In this varied and mingled vision of the city, there are a thousand things of light and shade, and oddities and fantasies, which must long lie in the memory, when reviewing the ever-varying forms in which the character and the taste and the religions of mankind present themselves; in this very strange city of the East.[65]

Lost in the Indian city and separated from his cakes and pickles on board the USS *Columbia*, Taylor's own instinct was to make a dash for the only things that made sense and were familiar to him: 'As my sympathies directed, my first call made in Bombay was upon the American missionaries.'[66] (Here one is reminded of Francis Warriner, who likewise felt himself overcome by the strange and unfamiliar as soon as he landed in China. Warriner too felt the need to seek the company of an American, and to that end made his way to the home of the first American missionary he could locate.[67])

By this stage of both his journey and his narrative, Taylor had ventured far from the comfort zone of home. We can see how his worldview was neatly ordered, in terms of circles of knowledge and comprehension. At the centre of this world was the zone of the homely and familiar: his American and Protestant identity which were for him both normal and ideal. His dealings with Portuguese and Spanish Catholics was the first instance of contrast, which accentuated his beliefs and identity even further. In India he came face-to-face with the radical Other, people whose beliefs and philosophies were entirely different to his own, and beyond the pale of what he regarded as the normal and intelligible. When news of the attack on the American ship *Eclipse* reached the squadron in Ceylon, Taylor was already convinced that they were indeed a long way from home, and out in the exotic East. The manner in which he describes the attack on Kuala Batu and Meukek was thus configured long before the USS *Columbia* even entered Sumatran waters: In the mind of Taylor, they were literally sailing into the heart of the exotic and alien Other.

That Taylor regarded 'the dark-skinned and frowning-faced Sumatrans'[68] as a 'different people' who were entirely alien to his own fellow Americans was not surprising when we consider his own background and prejudices. He had made it abundantly clear that he regarded 'all the Malays as treacherous, (and that) implicit confidence could not judiciously be placed' in them[69]; and

65 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 194.
66 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 194.
67 Warriner, *Cruise*, pp. 197, 201.
68 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 269.
69 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 268.

this included Malays like Po' Adam who had, on previous occasions, gone out of their way to help rescue Americans themselves. None of this seemed to matter for Taylor, for he was literally in a different world altogether, and dealing with 'miserable people' who obviously had nothing in common with his own culture and religion, and who would soon be sent 'into another world' by the guns of the *Columbia* and the *John Adams*.

This sense of radical difference – in terms of culture and religion – may partly account for the stark changes and shifts that we find in his own narrative when Taylor writes about the action that took place in Kuala Batu and Meukek. The same Taylor who sermonized so tirelessly about the grace of God and the wonders of nature seemed less inclined to extend God's mercy to cultures and societies other than his own. Whatever moral lessons that Chaplain Taylor had delivered to his congregation back in America were forgotten by the time he reached Sumatra. His account of the bombing of the town of Meukek was one that was written with perceptible gloating and excitement, as he described the razing of the settlement in considerable detail:

> The forked and ambient and towering flames mingling with the dark and floating columns of smoke, now possessed the entire town, and all was within full view of our ships. *It was a scene of grandeur in destruction to be looked at with profound interest*, while pity, blended with a sense of just displeasure, rose in the bosom, as the eye contemplated the extended devastation. *It was a spectacle of grandeur as beheld in the day-time – its magnificence and sublimity could not be described as it would have gleamed, in its terror and illumination, in the night*.[70]

Unlike his fellow American Francis Warriner, who had been appalled by the violence that was meted out upon the people of Kuala Batu years earlier, and who had criticized the First Sumatran Expedition as an affair 'conducted in rather a desultory manner',[71] Taylor evidently had no such misgivings. He seemed enthralled by the 'spectacle of grandeur' he had witnessed with morbid fascination, as both Kuala Batu and Meukek were incinerated by superior American firepower, and was satisfied that 'the destruction was complete'; proudly declaring that the attacks of Kuala Batu and Meukek had 'showed the daring and determination of a gallant band of American sailors

70 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 295. Emphasis mine.

71 Warriner, *Cruise*, p. 92.

on a foreign strand, ten thousand miles away from home'.[72] No mention was ever made of the civilian casualties in the assaults, or the very real possibility that the flames that mesmerized him so were also devouring the bodies of dead Sumatran villagers.

On the voyage back to America the squadron stopped at Macao and Canton, and it was here (in the second volume of his work) that Taylor forwarded his views on the Chinese as well as their religion and culture. Shades of Edmund Roberts' disdain for the religions of the East could be read off the pages of Taylor's work. Confucianism was, for him, not really a religion at all, but rather 'a system of political economy' that placed emphasis on social order and obedience, but lacked spirituality and a transcendent ethic. (As we have seen earlier, Roberts held a similar view of the belief-systems of China, which he felt were self-serving, ritually formalistic and bereft of metaphysical content.) Chinese culture and society were seen by Taylor as stagnant and inert, and he regarded Christian missionary activism as the means to open up China to external influences that he regarded as liberal and progressive. Taylor insisted that 'China must be opened' and that 'the time is at hand when a combination of nations more enlightened and more powerful in arms, sciences and literature, shall will it so; and the Chinese cannot, in the nature of moral causes and their effects, hinder it'.[73] Taylor was equally disparaging in his remarks about Buddhism, and was not impressed by the temples he visited in Canton (like the Temple of Hanan), where he found the statues ugly, and 'neither divine nor human'.[74]

It should be noted here that Taylor was not – and had never claimed to be – an expert on the religions and cultures of Asia. (Some credit should also go to Edmund Roberts, who at least made an attempt to read more about the history and societies of Southeast Asia that he dealt with.) The only scripture that Taylor was familiar with since his days at Yale were the scripture of his own religion; and for him all other belief-systems – be it the Hinduism of the Indians, the Islam of the Sumatrans or the Confucianism and Buddhism of the Chinese – were alien and impenetrable. His jaundiced description of the religions of the East were pedestrian and shallow, but that did not seem to bother him much; and one would not read his *Voyage around the World* for a comprehensive account of religious pluralism and diversity in Asia in the nineteenth century. But what the *Voyage* does convey to the reader today is a clear impression of how an American viewed Asia

72 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 296.
73 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 118.
74 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 159, 157-162.

in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and it brings to the foreground the cultural bias and cultural blindness of American Orientalist writing at that stage of American history instead.

4.III Finding comfort in the familiar: Fitch W. Taylor's deliberate blindness

> He was impregnably armored by his good intentions and ignorance.[75]
> – Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*

From India to Southeast Asia to China, Asia was a land apart and foreign to Taylor; and his view of the Malays of Sumatra was in keeping with his views of Indians, Chinese and other Asians he came across in the course of his voyage. Asia was a vast land of great opportunity to him, and that opportunity came in the form of both extending and expanding America's trading network as well as augmenting the efforts of American missionaries who would open up the region even further to American values and commerce. Taylor shared the view of other American expansionists that the American government ought to promote America's interests and presence in Southeast and East Asia with more vigour; and he called for the establishment of more American consulates in the Spanish, Dutch, British and Portuguese colonies of the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, the Straits Settlements and Macao.[76] Trade and missionary activity thus went hand-in-hand for Taylor, in the same manner that he – as Chaplain – had tagged along on America's latest military adventure in the East Indies.

Taylor's unreserved endorsement of the attacks on Kuala Batu and Meukek, underscored by his stated misgivings and distrust of the Malay-Muslims who were at the receiving end of the *Columbia*'s guns, made clear the faultline that distanced him from the Sumatrans he was writing about: This was an account of Southeast Asia – and Asia by extension – penned by an American of the Episcopalian Church, who viewed and understood the world through the lens of his nationality and religion. What mattered to Taylor was the loss of American Christian lives, and the need to avenge that loss in no uncertain terms. He was less concerned about the Sumatrans who bore the brunt of America's 'just retribution', for he had noted himself that they were simply 'miserable people' anyway.

75 Greene, p. 213.
76 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*. vol. 2, p. 107.

The contemporary reader may be hard-pressed to reconcile Taylor's professions of faith and piety with his disregard for other races and religions, but it has to be remembered that he was an American living and writing in the first half of the nineteenth century and his worldview was not unique at the time. That Taylor regarded the natives of Sumatra as a race apart was hardly a novel idea, for the belief that humanity was divided into separate species had been around for ages and was supported by the theory of polygenesis, which can be dated all the way back to the Enlightenment and some of its foremost thinkers like Voltaire. But in the American context the further development of scientific racism in the nineteenth century was the result of the efforts of men like the Philadelphia-born Episcopalian physician Samuel George Morton (1799-1851) and the slave-owning doctor Josiah C. Nott (1804-1873), who turned to the Old Testament and argued that Biblical accounts of Adam referred only to Caucasians. As the founder of what would later be dubbed the 'American School' of Ethnography Samuel Morton's influence on the development of scientific racism was great: His creationist account of human development rejected both evolution theory and the idea of a common origin of humankind, which in turn lent support to the claims of men like Nott who argued that slavery could be justified on both Biblical and scientific grounds, for 'inferior' races would be better able to achieve their full potential while in the condition of servitude.[77] Neither Morton nor Nott felt that their scientific racism contradicted their Christian ethics, and Taylor did not suffer any doubts either. Living as he did in his white Christian world, he was happy to see the 'savages' of Sumatra blasted to pieces and 'sent to another world', as they did not inhabit *his* world.

Racist attitudes towards people of colour were certainly not an American monopoly then, as the European powers pressed ahead with their own efforts at empire-building. In the same year that Meukek was bombed by the USS *Columbia* and *John Adams*, Britain was engaged in First Anglo-Afghan War and the First Opium War with China, and the British New Zealand Company had begun to plan the colonization of New Zealand. American attitudes towards Asians and Africans were hardly any different from those of the British, French or Dutch; and if Taylor could summarily dismiss Asians as treacherous and backward while abroad, the same process of othering the Other was taking place back home in America. In 1838 President Van Buren had ordered General Winfield Scott to forcibly relocate the Cherokee people from the Southeast to Oklahoma, and in the course of that relocation – dubbed the Trail of Tears – 20,000 Native Americans had been forced to

77 See Horsman.

leave their ancestral lands to make way for American settlers instead. The Second Seminole War (1835-1842), which began during the time of President Jackson and continued throughout Van Buren's presidency was the longest war waged against the native peoples of America, and whatever violence that was meted out upon the people of Kuala Batu and Meukek was in keeping with America's own expansionist campaign back home.

The negative view of other races and nations that permeates much of Taylor's own writing was a reflection of the casual racism that was at work in his own country, where there was still the widespread belief that white Americans could not live in a multicultural society alongside black Americans as neighbours. The necessity of keeping the 'races' apart was made clear during the *Amistad* affair of 1839-1842.[78] It showed how cultural and ethnic diversity in America was predicated upon the belief in racial segregation, and the idea that whites, blacks and Native Americans should not co-mingle, for fear of creating a hybrid, 'mongrel' race.[79] Later in the mid-1840s the state of Oregon would pass its own Black Exclusion Law which forbade Black Americans – freemen or slaves – from living or working in the state. (When Oregon was admitted into the Union in 1859, its constitution prohibited coloured people from settling and owning property there, for Oregon was meant to be a new state where a free society was meant to be created without any black people.[80]) If Americans were 'bound apart' back home, they were as likely to maintain the same modes of segregation abroad as well.

Taylor was not troubled by these developments at home, and he was equally untroubled by the conduct of the American Navy abroad. Of the three accounts of American interventions in Sumatra that we have seen – those by Reynolds, Warriner and Taylor – Taylor's is the most remote and distant from the Sumatrans themselves.

Notwithstanding their support for the attack on Kuala Batu during the First Sumatran Expedition, both Warriner and Reynolds also attempted a

78 The prevalent attitude towards racial segregation was laid bare during and after the *Amistad* incident, which took place in July 1839 when the Spanish slave ship *La Amistad* was taken over by the slaves who were being transported from Cuba. John Quincy Adams took up the case of the slaves, arguing that they were free men who had been forced into slavery. The district court ruled that the slaves were indeed free men, but that they should be sent back to Africa, the country of their origin. As Osagie has argued, the *Amistad* affair showed just how deep the belief in racial segregation in America was, and the widespread opinion that whites and blacks could not live together in mixed communities. See Osagie; Jones, *Mutiny*.

79 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*.

80 See McLagan; Kopp.

study of Sumatran society and history in their respective works. Reynolds offered a broad survey of other Sumatran communities such as the Batak and the Minangkabau, and Warriner went a step further as he was a witness to some of the face-to-face negotiations between the Americans and Sumatrans after Kuala Batu had been bombed by them. To his credit, Warriner was perhaps the most objective writer among them, and the one who came closest to recognizing the common humanity he shared with the Asian Other. One of the more introspective passages in Warriner's work is found in Chapter 18 when he described his initial reaction to the sight of Chinese women with bound feet. He confessed that he was 'initially disposed, like others, to treat Chinese women with contempt' for a cultural practice that he little understood; but then went on to add that 'so far and wide are the Chinese females condemned and ridiculed for this custom, that it is not necessary for me to add anything in the way of reproof or satire'.[81] Rather, Warriner noted that his own countrywomen back in America were equally bound (literally) by and to fashion, and that in America women 'gird their cinctures about their waist so tight, as to displace the organs essential to health and life'.[82] Coming to the defence of Chinese women, Warriner implored American womenfolk to consider the constraints that they themselves had been put under, and to try to 'put the shoe on the right foot'.[83] No attempt at finding a common ground with the Other can be found in Taylor's work.

Though Taylor was close to the fighting that occurred – so close, in fact, that he could clearly see the thatched roofs and bamboo walls of Muekek devoured by the flames, the smoke rising heavenwards and the cinders glowing among the ashes – he made little attempt to know and understand the 'miserable people' who had been shot at by his fellow Americans. The closest he came into contact with them was when Po' Adam boarded the vessel, to convey news of the goings-on at Kuala Batu. But as we have seen Taylor was dismissive of Po' Adam and did not believe anything that the Sumatran said (any more than he trusted the Portuguese Catholics he met in Brazil and India), and saw no point in any kind of meaningful communication with the native Other. This inclination to avoid any meaningful contact, grounded in Taylor's bias and his belief that there was a radical incommensurability between the perspectives of the American and the Malay, would be a theme repeated in later American writings on Southeast Asia, by the likes of Albert Bickmore, who, in his *Travels in the East Indian*

81 Warriner, *Cruise*, p. 208.
82 Ibid., p. 208.
83 Ibid., p. 209.

Archipelago (1869), would likewise demonstrate their disinclination towards any form of meaningful communication, grounded on the belief that the native Other had nothing to say.

What Taylor longed for was a comfortable homeland that he could call his own, and which would always remain unchanging, safe and familiar. His work ended with a few lines of verse that read as follows:

> I've wandered 'mid palaces where pleasures are known,
> And I've traversed the ocean where the blue waves foam;
> I've mingled with great ones, seen the gay earth,
> But found nought so dear as my own native hearth.[84]

Though Taylor noted that 'all the associations of the following lines may not be exclusively connected with the descriptions of these volumes', he was closer to the truth than he cared to admit. For the moral code he lived by was a Christian one, and the public he wrote for was an American one. The attacks in Sumatra may have taken place 'ten thousand miles away from home', but in a sense Chaplain Fitch Waterman Taylor had never left home at all, and was always in the zone of the comfortable and the familiar – along with the cakes and pickles in his cabin.

Upon his return to the homeland that he loved so much, Taylor was appointed Chaplain in the American Navy, sealing his reputation for good. For the rest of his life he served as naval Chaplain, up to his death on 24 July 1865 when he was Senior Chaplain in the service of his country. The bible-bearing seafaring minister from Yale would write other works – *The July Tour* (1841)[85] and *The Broad Pennant* (1848), which was an account of American Gulf Squadron during the Mexican conflict[86] – but his account of the voyage of the USS *Columbia* would be his most enduring piece of writing, republished again and again in 1842, 1843, 1846, 1851 and 1855 by a host of different publishers and with a title that seemed to grow longer by the year.[87] But it wasn't just the title of Taylor's work that grew longer

84 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 2, p. 331.

85 Taylor, *Ella V.*

86 Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*.

87 See, for instance: Fitch Waterman Taylor, *A Voyage round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia; Attended by Her Consort, the Sloop of War* John Adams*, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read; Also Including an Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast* (1851), and *A Voyage round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate* Columbia*; Attended by Her Consort, the Sloop of War* John Adams*, and Commanded by Commodore George C. Read; Also*

with the passing of time. His view of Southeast Asia as a region populated by primitive and uncivilized natives would be the other enduring legacy that he would leave behind, and in the decades that followed the trope of the backward and savage Other would be resuscitated once again, in the imaginings of other American adventurers to the East Indies.

The traveller-authors we have looked at so far – Reynolds, Warriner, Roberts and Taylor – were all Americans who had travelled to Southeast Asia in the first half of the nineteenth century. They were acutely aware of their place and the standing of their country in global affairs; and they often felt the need to seek comfort in the company of their like-minded countrymen. By the second half of the nineteenth century America would evolve to become a more powerful country, and eventually an Asia-Pacific power with the ambition to match. The stage would be set for the arrival of another kind of American traveller altogether; one who was able to risk everything by travelling to Southeast Asia alone, and who would arrive with promises of a better world delivered on the back of gunboats.

Including an Account of the Bombarding and Firing of the Town of Muckie, on the Malay Coast, and the Visit of the Ships to China during the Opium Difficulties at Canton, and Confinement of the Foreigners in That City (1855).

5 Flirting with danger

Walter Murray Gibson, the American nobody wanted

> The Dutchmen near the fort had said, that the American was a spying bird.[1]
> – Walter M. Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*

5.I From sea to shining sea: America's expansion and consolidation in the 1840s and 1850s

The race to colonize Southeast Asia continued throughout the 1840s; and the British, Dutch and Spanish gave no quarter to other Western powers that tried to edge their way into the region. The Danish, Italians and Austrians had also tried to gain a foothold, but were unsuccessful. Russian and Austrian ships made the journey to the ports of the Indies in search of rare commodities to bring back home, but their forays were few and far between. Denmark's attempts to settle in the Nicobar Islands proved futile, as was Italy's attempt to buy the islands from the Danes.[2] Only France would enjoy some success, as the French began their long-drawn process of colonizing Cochinchina.[3]

America's involvement in Asian affairs waxed and waned during the 1840s as a result of political developments closer to home. During the 'accidental presidency' of John Tyler (1841-1845), the unaligned President had sought to extend American influence further abroad to Hawaii and China but by the late 1840s the American Pacific Squadron found itself diverted to another theatre of conflict as a result of the Mexican-American War.[4] From 1845 to

1 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. 128.

2 Denmark was keen to establish a colony of its own in Southeast Asia, after having sold Tranquebar and Serampore to the British East India Company. Between the years 1845 to 1847 the Danish corvette *Galathea* commanded by Captain (and future Vice-Admiral and Minister for Naval Affairs) Steen Andersen Bille made its way to Southeast Asia. A survey of the Nicobar Islands was done, and maps produced, and once again the Danes planned to set up a settlement there for Danish settlers to migrate to. But the project was eventually cancelled for it was felt that the climate was too unhealthy and not suitable for Europeans. In 1864 and 1868 Italy tried to buy the islands from Denmark, but negotiations came to naught. Finally in 1869 Denmark sold the islands to Britain, and the Nicobar Islands became part of British India. See Bille.

3 See Brocheux and Hemery.

4 John Tyler's 'accidental presidency' was the result of the sudden death of the Whig President John Henry Harrison, whose stay in office lasted only a month. Unable to count upon political support back home, Tyler focused on America's relations abroad and in 1842 declared that

1849 the United States was led by President James Knox Polk, who would go down in history as the President who expanded the territory of the United States to become what it is today: a country whose borders stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. Though Polk had stated during his inaugural address that 'the world has nothing to fear from military ambition in our government', his period of leadership was one where American power was demonstrated in the most ambitious terms.[5]

The Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 was the event that shaped America's future in no uncertain terms. Earlier in 1836 the territory of Texas had unilaterally declared its independence from the Mexican republic. America annexed Texas in 1845, sparking outrage among Mexicans who never recognized the independence of Texas in the first place. The war was a controversial affair for both countries: In America opponents of the war like John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln and Robert Toombs were highly critical of President Polk, who was criticized for having expansionist ambitions contrary to the neutral stand that America had professed since 1776.[6] In Mexico the Americans' incursion into northern Mexico was a shock that revealed the extent to which the country was politically divided between the Centralistas and Republicanos, and ill-prepared to defend itself. On 29 December 1845 Texas became the 28th state of the United States of America and the American government offered the sum of 25 million dollars to the Mexican government to procure the provinces of Alta California and Nuevo Mexico. The government of Jose Joaquid de Herrera refused the offer, and war ensued on 23 April 1846 – though the Mexican federation was weak and its army demoralized and unprepared.

Mexico was attacked on land and from sea, and the ports of California were blockaded by the ships of the American Pacific Squadron. On 2 February 1848, the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hildago was signed between the two governments, and America was able to take Texas as well as California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Arizona, and finally had direct access to the Pacific coast. Mexico had its territory reduced to less than half of what it had in 1846. Britain would no longer be able to halt America's expansion or create a buffer state in the North American continent. Another outcome of

Hawaii would be a concern of the United States, and that Britain should not attempt to build a colony there. Later in 1844 he sent Caleb Cushing to negotiate the Wanghia Treaty with China. See Crapol; Peterson.

5 See Haynes; Merry.

6 See Greenberg; Merry.

the war was the further weakening of the Native Americans of the area – the Comanches, Apaches and Navajo.

With almost the entire North American continent part of the United States and Mexico held at bay, the United States of America no longer faced a serious threat from any neighbouring country. As Herring has noted: 'through much of the nineteenth century and beyond, geography conferred upon the United States an advantage that few nations enjoyed: the absence of a major foreign threat'.[7] Herring has also argued that American isolationism was overstated, and this was clear for all to see during the presidencies of Tyler and Polk. President Tyler had made it clear that Hawaii was off limits to the British, bringing the Hawaiian Islands within the orbit of American influence.

The United States took further steps into Southeast Asia from the 1840s to the 1850s. In 1843 the American heavy frigate USS *Constitution* – which was then under the command of Captain John 'Mad Jack' Percival – embarked on a trip around the world and visited Brunei on 6 April 1845, thus paving the way for America's long-term relationship with the kingdom. America could not prevent British encroachment upon the kingdom, and in 1846 Brunei was targeted by the British as the 'den of piracy' along the northern coast of Borneo, and attacked. Following the defeat of Brunei, Sultan Saifuddin II was forced to surrender the island of Labuan to the British, and the Anglo-Brunei Treaty of Commerce and Friendship was signed in 1847.

The Americans were not, however, about to allow their relationship with Brunei to be diminished despite the kingdom's weakened position, and the American-Brunei Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation was signed between the two countries by Joseph Balestier (America's Resident based in Singapore) and the Sultan of Brunei on 23 June 1850. The treaty was later ratified by President Fillmore (1850-1853) in January 1853 and subsequently proclaimed by President Franklin Pierce on 12 July 1854 (see Appendix B). America was slowly making its presence felt in Asia, and busily signing treaties everywhere: The Wanghia Treaty with China was signed in 1844 and in 1850 a new treaty of commerce was negotiated and signed with the kingdom of Siam as well, negotiated by the same Joseph Balestier who worked on the treaty with Brunei. But Balestier was an official representative of the United States government, and he had every right to speak on behalf of his government and his people. The problem arose when private individuals went gallivanting across the globe on their own self-appointed missions, for that meant flirting with danger.

7 Herring, p. 6.

5.II 'Jealousy had met me at the threshold of Netherland India': Walter Murray Gibson's misadventure in Sumatra

> You Americans, said the naval commander with a laugh of apparent good humour, can beat all the world in telling a good story.[8]
> – Walter M. Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*

Before reality, we begin with fiction.

In the year 1855 the booksellers of New York were pleased to offer a new title: *The Prison of Weltevreden; and a Glance at the East Indian Archipelago.* The author of the work was a certain Walter Murray Gibson, and the work was in fact a fictional account of an incident, or series of incidents, that led to a diplomatic entanglement between the government of the United States and the government of the Netherlands in the Dutch East Indies.

Gibson had chosen to write about his journey to Sumatra – and his ordeal in a Dutch gaol – in a fictional manner, and he wove a droll story indeed. The tale begins with a 'pale-faced' fugitive aboard an American vessel, the *Palmer*, heading away from Dutch-controlled Batavia. As the *Palmer* sailed away, the passengers on board enquired about the identity of the mysterious passenger, and the 'thin, ghastly' individual slowly began to recount his story, and explained how he came to be a prisoner in the Dutch prison of Weltevreden.[9]

The narrative then shifts to the first-person register, as the fugitive began his story with an account of his uncle, who was a seafarer who had told him stories of the island of Sumatra, where there was once 'a great city in the middle of the island, a city once of mighty extent and population, whose Sultans had given laws to all the rest of the Malay nations. But this great city had decayed; and its empire had been divided into many small and feeble portions. Now the Malays looked to the restoration of their sacred city; and their traditions had pointed to the fair-skinned men from the West, who should come with wisdom and great power.'[10] Driven by his desire for fortune and honour, the narrator resolved to voyage to Sumatra.[11] And to that end – through a combination of labour and luck – he eventually managed to procure for himself 'a man-of-war built schooner, long and low in the hull, broad in the beam, and sharp at the bows', and he named the ship

8 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. 137.
9 Ibid., pp. 10-17.
10 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
11 Ibid., pp. 24-25, 33.

the *Flirt*.[12] With a crew of eleven, and 'not one cannon, not a keg of powder' aboard her, the *Flirt* set off.[13]

The *Flirt* made its way across the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, passing Madagascar, Mauritius, St Pauls and the Cocos Islands along the way[14] – but Sumatra was the objective. The vessel skirted the northern coast of Sumatra, where 'there was no risk of coming in contact with European jealousy and power', and proceeded to the Banka coast.[15] It was at Mintok fort, by the Banka coast, that the *Flirt* made first contact with the Dutch, and the narrator was invited to meet the Dutch Resident who was based at the fort. From this point onwards, the narrative takes a turn for the sinister, as the Dutch Resident was wary of the *Flirt*'s intentions, and the narrator was asked why he had ventured so far into Dutch colonial territory.[16] But the narrator's own view of the Dutch and their methods of colonial governance was hardly flattering either. He spoke of the Dutch mode of rule and surveillance in Banka in the following terms:

> You may call the subsidiary relation of the native princes with the Government, a wicked conspiracy of sordid intelligence with imbecile rank to fleece the simple masses; and the police surveillance, a base system of espionage; but there has been nothing in the history of other European dominations in the East, or of Christian and civilized domination over weak and ignorant aboriginal races upon your own continent, which would furnish to Holland a more disinterested example.[17]

Despite several attempts to dissuade him, the narrator was bent on moving on to Palembang, where he expected to discover the 'Venice of the East'. The Dutch had assigned him a Malay translator by the name of Bahdoo, and prior to setting off he was met by the Chinese man Lim Boo Seng, who requested that a letter be delivered to his friend Oey Soch Tchay in Palembang.[18] On the journey to Palembang (around early 1852) the narrator encounters some

12 Ibid., p. 33.
13 Ibid., p. 36.
14 Ibid., p. 68.
15 Ibid., p. 71.
16 To aggravate matters further the Resident then broke the news of the capture and killing of Americans who had tried to annex the Spanish territory of Cuba, and from then on the narrator 'was met by strong anti-American feeling, cloaked under a guise of diplomatic politeness' (ibid., pp. 76-77).
17 Ibid., p. 86.
18 Ibid., p. 90.

rather nasty pirates, meets some locals, loses some blood to leeches and speaks highly of the British adventurer James Brooke[19] as well as the East India Company-man Stamford Raffles.[20] Apart from valiant Englishmen and envious Dutchmen, the narrator also makes mention of the hairy *orang kubu* who lived in the interior, and who were covered with hair and who were stronger than other normal men.[21] An adventurous tone is maintained throughout the narrative, but Gibson's work was also an American adventure that exalted the achievement of a particular American hero:

> It was sweet after the day's fatigue and adventure, to sit upon my quarter-deck, and feel the wafts of cool air, that blew perfume from the woods, and played with the folds of the flag of America, which I felt proud to think I was the first to bear up this noble Sumatran stream.[22]

The centrepiece of the story is the arrival at Palembang, where the narrator met the Arab *shahbandar* (town-master) and the *panyorang* (Pangeran for 'prince').[23] The *panyorang* complained about the Dutch, claiming that no other power could stop their advance across Sumatra other than America. In the words of the native ruler:

> The English has unwisely given up all that Raffles had gained, to the Dutch company, who grasped at all things for Holland, and wanted to make slaves of Arabs, Malays, and Chinamen, all alike. The *Panyorang* said, the Portuguese are gone; the Spaniards are very weak; the English have abandoned the archipelago by treaty; and there is no power to stay the all-devouring Dutch, unless it comes from America. Was it coming? Had I come to see, where and when Americans should come?[24]

The narrator's mission to befriend the natives and deliver the benefits of civilization was, however, thwarted by the ever-suspicious Dutch, who had been tracking him from the moment he arrived in their territory.[25] Soon after the *Flirt* anchored at Palembang, the ship was visited by the Dutch

19 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
20 Ibid., p. 128.
21 Ibid., pp. 120-123.
22 Ibid., p. 118. Again and again the author reminds the reader that this was the first time the American flag was seen in Sumatra, as on pages 165 and 166.
23 Ibid., p. 124.
24 Ibid., p. 128.
25 Ibid., p. 129.

Resident, Assistant Resident, Chief of Commissariat, Major Commandant and other officers from the local garrison. They were invited aboard, and though they were impressed by 'the scarlet brocatelle that hung in heavy valence folds around the saloon' of the schooner, they were less impressed by the narrator's explanation of why he was in Palembang in the first place.[26] The narrator continued his discussions with the Panyorang of Palembang for several days, but with the ever-watchful eye of the Dutch set upon him, later decided to up-anchor and sail to Jambee (Jambi), for he '[w]anted to go and see a Prince, who was not surrounded by the trammels of European power. I wanted to see the Malay, the ruling race of the archipelago, in his highest state of independence.'[27]

To that end, the narrator had his secretary, Kiagoos Lanang, prepare a letter for the ruler of Jambi (dated 4 February 1852) that spoke of 'the wealth and power of America' and 'the friendly dispositions of the American people' (despite the fact that he was the only American present there and the population of America had not been consulted beforehand). The letter was reproduced in full thus:

> I (undersigned) – to the lord Sultan who rules over the empire of Jambee. This residing in the great land of America, send greetings. Writing will be brought into your presence, by the chief officer commanding my vessel; a man of truth and skill, in whose words and knowledge I have great confidence. He will speak of the great land from whence I come; of the wealth and power of America, and of the friendly dispositions of the American people towards his Highness of Jambee. He will inform my lord Sultan of my wish to visit the Kraton at Jambee, that I may present some gifts, and sentiments of friendship to his Highness. Therefore my lord Sultan will be pleased to give orders to his officers, that the bearer of this may be allowed to dwell for a time with peace and comfort in the territory of Jambee; and afterwards, when he shall have accomplished his desire, to be permitted to go his way without molestation.[28]

The letter would prove to be the cause of the narrator's undoing, for it was written in Malay script, which the narrator could not read and did not understand.[29] Soon after the letter was sent off the narrator found himself under arrest by

26 Ibid., p. 162.
27 Ibid., p. 183.
28 Ibid., p. 204.
29 Ibid., p. 214.

the commander of the Dutch man-o-war *Pylades*, who barked that 'Yankee brigands should be strung up'.[30] The 'Yankee insurrectionnaire' was ordered to bring down the American flag from the *Flirt*, the vessel was searched, and the crew were taken into custody – thus beginning the ordeal of the narrator.

The Dutch Resident of Palembang had written to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies Albertus Duymaer van Twist (1851-1856) in Batavia, warning the colonial administration about the American 'who wanted to act the part of James Brooke'[31] and who had tried to curry favour with the Malay rulers of Sumatra. Claiming that the 'acts of this stranger should be regarded as treason, and punished with death',[32] it seemed as if the narrator's idyllic interlude in the East was about to end in disaster. In the investigation that followed, the accusers claimed that the narrator had sent out a letter which promised a shipment of arms and ships to the ruler of Jambi, for the sake of aiding a native revolt against the Dutch in Sumatra:

> The translation of a letter, said to have been addressed to a Sumatran prince, was shown. This one spoke of powder, bullets, and blunderbusses; of *lelahs*, or Sumatran blunderbusses, and several ships of war; to be presented on the part of the United States of America to his highness; and this letter, this offer, was the chief sole foundation for the charge of high treason.[33]

Just who had written the letter – the narrator, the translator or the Dutch themselves – was never made clear; though the outcome of the trial was. Locked up in the prison of Weltevreden, the narrator came into contact with a motley crew of desperados, lunatics and ne'er-do-wells.[34] (To add emphasis to the claim that life in a Dutch colonial prison was truly uncomfortable, the work also included a rather sombre illustration of the narrator's dingy cell, on page 261; though there was no accompanying image of the 'vulgar, bestial old dragoon' who ran the place.[35]) To add insult to injury the narrator was only met by the American agent in Batavia several days after he was thrown in jail, for:

> The agent had not called upon the commander sooner, because he had heard such atrocious stories of piracy charged upon the commander; of

30 Ibid., p. 217.
31 Ibid., p. 233.
32 Ibid., p. 233.
33 Ibid., p. 357.
34 Ibid., pp. 249-254.
35 Ibid., p. 272.

> sales of 'arms to rebel chiefs'; of scuttling defenceless vessels in various parts of the archipelago; and such rumours of the most daring buccaneering, that he had said to the Resident of Batavia, when conversing about the Americans in prison, 'Hang them, there are too many such filibustering fanatics in America; hang them at once.'[36]

From this point onwards the narrative meanders along unevenly: The narrator was released from prison but not allowed to leave Batavia on account of legal technicalities; though he was informed that he would surely be re-arrested soon. Twelve months after being thrown into jail, the narrator was put on trial again – and the American naval commander and American Consular Agent in Batavia did not appear to defend the accused.[37] Again the narrator was accused of fermenting revolution among the natives of Sumatra, but this time as part of an American association that commanded a fleet of ten frigates.[38] Without support from anyone – including his countrymen – the narrator felt himself abandoned by his fellow Americans. Later he noted that 'an American Commodore had passed out of the way of Batavia, saying that he had a treaty on hand that was to secure some Japanese trade'[39] (This was almost certainly a reference to the mission to Japan commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry.[40]) Convinced that he would be put to death, the narrator planned his escape and eventually managed to sneak out in the dead of night and make his way to the docks where he snuck aboard the *Palmer*, and was thus on his way back to freedom.[41] Thus ended Gibson's story of *The Prison of Weltevreden*, as the narrative had come full circle and returned to the beginning.

It is hard to classify Gibson's work. Though it was based – however loosely – on events that did take place and places that did exist, his use of literary devices such as the narrator who is also the primary character, the storytelling mode that animates the text and moves the story along, etc. would qualify *The Prison of Weltevreden* as a work of fiction. As far as adventure stories

36 Ibid., p. 278.

37 Ibid., p. 435.

38 Ibid., p. 438.

39 Ibid., pp. 475-476.

40 Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition to Japan began in 1852 and ended in 1854. Herring has noted that Perry 'employed Chinese coolies and African Americans in his entourage in ways that highlighted the power of whites over peoples of colour. He used uniforms, pageants, and even a blackface minstrel show as manifestations of Western cultural supremacy' (Herring, pp. 212-213). For a full account of the expedition, see Hawks.

41 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, pp. 486-488, 491-492.

go, Gibson's work was a surprisingly good read; full of vim and verve, and with a dose of intrigue too. Undoubtedly an attempt at telling his side of the story, *The Prison of Weltevreden* still left many questions unanswered; and the ones who had to do so on Gibson's behalf were the representatives of his government, which led to America's messy entanglement with a European colonial power in Southeast Asia.

5.III The Walter Gibson affair and its impact on American-Dutch relations

> My crime was that I belonged to a bold and adventurous nation, whose energy was apprehended as dangerous to Dutch rule in the East.[42]
> – Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary of State William L. Marcy

Before fiction, there was reality.

Two years before the publication of Walter Gibson's *The Prison of Weltevreden*, he had written another account of his misadventure in Sumatra that was dryly entitled 'The Case of the *Flirt*' (1853).[43] Unlike the romantic story he would weave later, this was a shorter report that was meant for the eyes of the powers-that-be in the American government.

Gibson had just returned to the United States after escaping from the Dutch prison in Batavia; and as soon as he got home began writing his account of what had happened with the hope that his government would come to his aid and secure reparation for the damages he claimed he had suffered. He stated that his ship had set off from America on 13 May 1851 and was actually bound for Singapore, but had stopped at Banka (in December 1851) due to bad weather; and that he had been 'invited' by the Dutch to join them on a short journey to Palembang as it was en route to Singapore.[44] Though lacking the flourish and drama that laced his fictional account of the expedition, three points were emphasized by Gibson in this earlier account that was intended for the eyes of the American government:

– Gibson claimed that the first mate of the *Flirt*, Charles Graham, requested that he be allowed to leave the vessel and end his service, as he wished to explore the interior of Sumatra on his own; and that he

42 Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary of State William L. Marcy, 26 May 1854.
43 See Gibson, 'The Case of the *Flirt*'.
44 Ibid., p. 4.

felt that he was no longer contractually obliged to serve as the mate of the schooner.[45]

– That the letter which he wrote and which was carried by the mate Graham was a sort of 'passport' to allow the latter safe passage; and that the original letter that Gibson wrote was written on *blue paper*, while the letter that was produced in court by the Dutch as evidence against him was on *white paper*, and thus 'declared to be a forgery'.[46]
– And that the circumstances of his arrest by the Dutch officer Nicolson 'was brutal', and that the Dutch 'hauled down the American flag, then flying on board my vessel, in an insulting manner, and in the presence of thousands of natives assembled on the Palembang river, at the time of my arrest'.[47]

Clearly intended to give a rosier account of his part in the drama, Gibson's report touched on the sensitive point of America's national pride. Parts of Gibson's report were unclear, and he never really gave an explanation about how he managed to escape from the prison of Weltevreden on 24 April 1853. Though some facts were curiously absent from his account, Gibson was lucid enough to remember that he was traumatized, and to that end demanded 50,000 dollars as compensation for the loss of his ship and another 50,000 dollars for his sufferings in prison.[48] At the end of his report, Gibson appealed to the American government 'that it will take into consideration the insulting manner in which the American schooner the *Flirt* was seized; and the United States flag was hauled or torn down at Palembang'.[49] A hundred thousand dollars was possibly just enough to help him recover from his ordeal, but an insult to the American flag deserved a response.

It was this report that set in motion a lengthy, and ultimately futile, correspondence that stretched from Washington, DC, to The Hague to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies; dragging into it personalities both high and low, from the Secretary of State of the US to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (who was also Prime Minister – Floris Adriaan van Hall) to Governor-General Albertus Duymaer van Twist (1851-1856) and the Judges of Batavia in the Dutch East Indies. In the course of the lengthy negotiation (which lasted from August 1853 to December 1854) testimonies,

45 Ibid., p. 6.
46 Ibid., p. 7.
47 Ibid., p. 7.
48 Ibid., p. 11.
49 Ibid., p. 11.

reports and court documents were brought up and exchanged by both sides to get a clearer picture of what had actually happened.[50] By the end of it all, none were any wiser.

Walter Gibson's escapades and the affair of the *Flirt* could not have come at a worse time for the American government. During the administrations of Presidents Millard Fillmore (1850-1853) and Franklin Pierce (1853-1857) America was trying to improve its relations with the polities of Southeast Asia, while establishing formal diplomatic ties with the few remaining Southeast Asian kingdoms that were still independent – Siam and Brunei. It was hoped that Americans travelling across the region would also abide by the laws of the respective European colonies, and behave themselves – like the Swiss, who always remained above board.[51]

In America's dealings with Southeast Asia, one particular theme had been repeatedly emphasized again and again: That America was unlike the other Western powers of continental Europe and had no imperial ambitions in the region. This was the message that was borne by US diplomats wherever they went, and in his 1856 address to King Mongkut at the Siamese court, the envoy Townsend Harris (who would later serve as America's envoy to Japan), summed up America's interests in Southeast Asia thus:

> The United States *does not hold any possessions in the East, nor does it desire any. The form of government* [*in the United States*] *forbids the holding of colonies.* The United States therefore cannot be the object of jealousy of any Eastern power. Peaceful commercial relations, which give as well as receive benefits, is what the President wishes to establish.[52]

Though Harris may have been humble and courteous in his dealings with the court of Siam, further to the east the conduct of American commanders and their warships were more sanguinary. As the Second Opium War in China

50 The primary sources of information that I have used here come from the collection of letters that were written by the principal actors themselves: Walter M. Gibson, William Learned Marcy (American Secretary of State serving under President Franklin Pierce), August Belmont (American representative and head of the Legation of the US at The Hague), Monsieur Floris Adriaan van Hall (Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and also Prime Minister), etc. These papers were collected and then submitted before Congress (33rd Congress, 2nd Session) by President Franklin Pierce himself on 16 December 1854. See 'Correspondence'.

51 Zangger has noted that an overwhelming majority of the Swiss who travelled to Southeast Asia were young (aged between 20 to 22) and that most of them came as apprentices who had been employed in Swiss firms previously. They came to the region to ply their trade and seldom involved themselves in the political affairs of the colonies they inhabited (pp. 30-31).

52 'Harris Treaty of 1856'.

raged on, the American sloops-of-war USS *Levant* and USS *Portsmouth* took part in the Battle of the Pearl River (16-24 November 1856). Soon after this engagement the Chinese consented to an agreement of neutrality with the Americans, which temporarily drew the Americans out of the conflict.[53] The affair of the *Flirt*, and the antics of its captain, Walter Gibson, was a different kind of problem altogether. It involved a private citizen of the United States who had taken it upon himself to procure a vessel, plan and undertake a journey, and to enter the territories claimed by the Dutch empire in the Indies without the support or sanction of the American government in the first place.

The man at the heart of the matter was Walter Murray Gibson (1822-1888), who was perhaps one of the most colourful characters to visit the Malay Archipelago in the nineteenth century, though he was not alone. Gibson followed in the wake of other merchant-adventurers such as James Brooke and Alexander Hare, who had likewise set their sights on the East Indies with the hope of elevating themselves. While some failed in their endeavours – Alexander Hare's attempt to create a colony for himself in Kalimantan had floundered; while Stamford Raffles' short stint as Lieutenant-Governor of Java (1811-1816) led to accusations of corruption and abuse of power – others, such as James Brooke, had succeeded. Gibson – then 29 years old – was an American, and a resident of Pendleton, North Carolina. As news of Gibson's arrest and the capture of the *Flirt* reached America, there was the pressing need to find out what had actually happened.

In September 1853 President Franklin Pierce's Secretary of State William Learned Marcy wrote to America's charge d'affaires at The Hague, August Belmont, about the case of Walter Gibson, asking Belmont to seek further clarification on the issue. William L. Marcy was known for his firm stand against American militarization,[54] and had been involved in similar diplomatic entanglements before: The 'Martin Koszta affair' was finally resolved when the Austrian government conceded to Marcy's demands, and allowed Martin Koszta to return to the US as an American citizen. It appeared as if Gibson's case required similar intervention on the part of the US government, but in April 1853 Gibson had already skedaddled from the prison of Weltevreden, and was on his way back to the United States, though without his ship and its crew.

53 See Clark.

54 As Secretary of State Marcy had bluntly stated: 'the United States considers powerful navies and large standing armies [...] to be detrimental to national prosperity and dangerous to civil liberty. The expense of keeping them up is burdensome to the people; they are in some degree a menace to peace among nations' (Atherley-Jones and Bellot, p. 319).

In the enquiry that followed only the basic facts could be grasped with certainty: The crew of the *Flirt* consisted of a group of men of different backgrounds. Walter M. Gibson led the expedition, while Charles M. Graham acted as mate. The rest of the crew consisted of Orrisson Chaffe, James Ivory, Jose Eduard Castillo, Henry Jones, Manuel Antonio de Sylvia, Antonio Mariana Piero, Joachin Antonio and Juan Manuel Taxeira. Members of the crew were unclear about the purpose of the expedition, and some believed that it was little more than 'a pleasure excursion' commanded by Gibson, who presented himself as 'a man of wealth'.[55] While the crew were regarded as accessories to the crime, the focus of the Dutch investigation was on the two key players: Walter Gibson and Charles Graham.

According to the Dutch, Charles Graham was the one who was tasked with delivering Gibson's letter to the Sultan of Jambi; and when he was arrested the letter was found on his person, hidden in his left stocking.[56] (Just why the letter was hidden in Graham's shoe was an open question, and one can only wonder what the Sultan of Jambi's reaction to the sweaty letter might have been had Graham reached his appointed destination.) The Dutch Resident of Palembang – C.A. de Brauw – reproduced the letter in full in the report that he submitted to the Dutch authorities in Batavia (and which was later submitted to the American government), and it read thus:

> Many greetings and compliments from me, Captain Walter, *living in America*, are transmitted, through the favour of Heaven to the Lord Sultan ruling in the State of Djambi.
> I inform you that my first officer, with three companions, will arrive before you, Sultan, as *it is my intention to put myself on terms of great friendship with you.* I am able to give you, Sultan, assistance in any way you desire, for *the American government lacks neither powder nor balls, cannons or guns, etc*. I am able to help and ameliorate the situation of the Malays, *for I do not like the Dutch.* You, Sultan, shall be able to give to the Malays all through the country good and wholesome laws. You will be able to unite with me. I wish also to know the route from Djambi to Palembang, and what the distance is. I can give such assistance as to improve everything. I wish all the Malays to be governed as they were in former times. In one month's time I can be at the mouth of the Djambi River. The Sultan can concert with my officer what will be the best course, for *the American government has no want of steamboats and ships of war;*

55 Deposition of Henry Jones', p. 71.
56 Ibid., p. 35.

> *they have many of both*. You, Sultan, need not be afraid. I will bring into order all the countries of Djambi and Palembang. *If possible, all the Dutch must be reduced.* In a few days I will be by you, and take possession of this State. Walter M. Gibson.[57]

Upon the letter was affixed Gibson's seal with the initials G.S., and below the seal was Gibson's name written in Malay as *Walter, son of Gibson*, dated 4 February 1852. Later in the course of his trial Gibson would declare that he was born in Britain and was only a resident of North Carolina, though the letter makes no mention of Britain at all.[58] Gibson may have tried to fudge his nationality in court, but the Dutch were very clear about the status of the ruler of Jambi and his kingdom: Following the Treaty of Peace and Friendship that was signed by J.W. Boers and Sultan Muhammad Phahareddin (Baharuddin) of Jambi on 5 December 1835, the Dutch authorities regarded the *entire* territory of Jambi as a Dutch protectorate, 'under the protection and sovereignty of the Netherland government of the Indies'.[59] As Hale has pointed out, 'the Dutch attitude towards their overseas territories was simple. They existed for the sole benefit of the mother country and all laws and regulations were geared to that end.'[60] And as far as they were concerned, Gibson the hustler had trespassed on their territory.

The letter addressed to the ruler of Jambi was the singular object that was at the heart of the affair: Gibson's account of how it came to be written changed again and again: At one point he claimed that it was wrongly drafted by his Malay secretary; at another point he claimed that it was an outright forgery. In his fictional work *The Prison of Weltevreden* (1855) he produced a completely different version of the letter altogether, to be read by American readers whose sympathy he sought. The Dutch on the other hand maintained that the letter they had in their possession was the genuine item and identified Gibson as the author and Graham as the courier.

The problem with the letter was that it was as clear as mud: Assuming that it was indeed the genuine item as the Dutch maintained, the question arises: Was Gibson acting alone, and what right did he have to speak on behalf of the American government? When he claimed that he wished to put himself in 'great friendship' with the Sultan of Jambi, he was evidently writing as a private individual and in his own capacity; no representation

57 Ibid., pp. 29-30. Emphasis mine.
58 Ibid., p. 32.
59 Judgement of the High Court of the Netherlands Indies, Batavia, 3 May 1853.
60 Hale, p. 327.

was made on behalf of the United States. In the letter Gibson stated that 'the American government lacks neither powder nor balls, cannons or guns, etc.' and that 'the American government has no want of steamboats and ships of war; they have many of both'. (A claim that was easily supported, thanks to the American attacks that had taken place at Kuala Batu and Meukek in 1832 and 1838-1839.) Taken at face value the claims could be read as banal, but in both instances the connection between the United States of America and Walter Gibson was decidedly unclear. Even though Gibson was an American citizen, he was clearly not on an appointed mission and had no right to speak on behalf of his government. And though Gibson had endeavoured to impress the Sultan of Jambi with the assurance that the United States 'lacked no balls', it was probably his claim that he did not like the Dutch and that 'all the Dutch must be reduced' that annoyed his captors more than anything else.

The most consistent aspect of Gibson's writing was his inconsistency, and how he spun one outlandish story after another. In his initial account of the affair of the *Flirt*, and in his letters of appeal to the American government, he would conjure up the litany of evils that had befallen him, and how he was unjustly persecuted by the Dutch authorities, presenting the latter as villains motivated by petty jealousy and unbridled contempt for foreigners. Again and again, Gibson would highlight his personal losses and his personal suffering – while forgetting the fate that had also befallen his woebegone first mate and crew, who had likewise been arrested and imprisoned. But in the very same letters he wrote he would also conjure up the theme of American pride and America's economic interest in Southeast Asia, making his personal cause a national one by extension. In his letter to Secretary Marcy of 26 May 1854 for instance, he argued that:

> To yield is to concede to the Dutch government a sovereignty which she has ever failed to establish by her arms, and to close a door voluntarily upon the progress of *our enterprise* into the fairest and richest portion of the East.[61]

That Gibson conflated his own Quixotic quest with America's commercial efforts and expansion 'into the fairest and richest portion of the East' was typical of the tone that he took in all his appeals to his government. The injury that he felt he had suffered at the hands of the Dutch authorities were for him injuries that were also sustained by his country; and to that

61 Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary Marcy, Washington, DC, 26 May 1854. Emphasis mine.

end it was incumbent for his government to act, for he had argued that '[n]ot as an individual, but as a citizen of the United States, I have been treated with indignity, my property destroyed, and my life threatened; and this is the strength of my appeal to my government'.[62]

In the first round of exchanges, the American envoy August Belmont wrote to the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs Floris Adriaan van Hall on 17 October 1853, on behalf of 'the American citizen' Gibson, presenting his demand for compensation and noting that 'according to the latter's statement [the American flag] was hauled down, in an insulting manner'.[63] The American envoy would send a second letter on 4 January 1854, and Van Hall's reply would come on 11 January where the flummoxed minister stated frankly that Gibson 'alone is the author of the evil, and that he is wrong in trying to render the Netherland colonial authorities responsible for his losses.'[64] A longer, and more strongly-worded, reply from the Dutch government would come on 25 February 1854 when Minister Van Hall noted that:

> The statement of facts, such as Mr. Walter M. Gibson has just made after his flight from Batavia and his return to America, *evinces a desire on his part to justify himself in the eyes of his government and of his countrymen by lessen the criminality of his actions*. […] It appearing that Mr. Gibson was sailing without any determined object, and for his amusement and instruction, he was received at the time of his arrival in Banca and Palembang with the frankest hospitality, by both the Netherlands authorities and the inhabitants. […] [But] *Mr. Gibson's conduct at Palembang has been not only imprudent and thoughtless, but wicked and criminal*; that if the plot which he had been hatching had not been discovered and defeated in time, it might have been attended by the most serious of consequences, especially as at that period the government of the Netherlands was at war with some of the Sumatra tribes, neighbours of Djambi; that the natives of this island are very irritable and warlike, and that the letters written by him to the Sultan of Djambi aimed at nothing less than to excite that prince, a vassal of said government, to rebellion, by promising him effective aid.[65]

From this stage onwards the correspondence between Washington and The Hague goes awry, with both sides insisting that they were correct in

62 Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary Marcy, Washington, DC, 26 May 1854.
63 A. Belmont, letter to Floris Adriaan van Hall, Hague, 17 October 1853.
64 F.A. van Hall, letter to A. Belmont, Hague, 11 January 1854.
65 F.A. van Hall, letter to A. Belmont, Hague, 25 February 1854. Emphasis mine.

their interpretation of events. The American envoy raised the issue of the 'hauling down' of the American flag, while the Dutch minister denied that any such act took place.[66] Soldiering on under orders from Washington, DC, Belmont raised the claim that Gibson had been framed by the Dutch, who had assigned to him spies in the guise of translators.[67] As both sides continued to belabour their points and contest the facts presented by the other, witnesses were called, testimonies recorded, court reports submitted and objections raised.

As the affair of the *Flirt* meandered along at a snail's pace, tragedy turned to farce; and the correspondents themselves began sniping at one another. Gibson continued to pester Secretary of State Marcy in Washington, DC,[68] and Secretary Marcy in turn asked that Belmont push the case with Minister Van Hall at The Hague. Letters went back and forth, from Washington, DC, to The Hague to Batavia and back, criss-crossing the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. A further touch of comedy was added to the situation when several important Dutch government documents were accidentally sent to Gibson, who had demanded that all his papers in Batavia be returned to him.

The exchange of letters continued for more than a year, and by December 1854 the tired drama of the *Flirt* was about to come to its graceless end. The breaking point was reached when it was discovered that a letter by Gibson – that was written by him from his prison cell and was a plea for clemency – had been excluded from the reports submitted to the American government. The discovery was damaging to say the least, as it supported the claim of the Dutch authorities that Gibson was not some innocent flâneur, idly sauntering across the archipelago at his leisure, and at one point had admitted his guilt in order to secure his release. From then on, things rapidly went downhill for Gibson as it was clear there was no happy ending in store.[69]

At the request of members of the House of Representatives President Franklin Pierce submitted a final report that included all the correspondence

66 F.A. van Hall, letter to A. Belmont, Hague, 7 July 1854.

67 In his letter to Van Hall dated 4 March 1854, Belmont pointed out that Gibson's letter to the Sultan of Jambi was translated and written in Malay by Kiagoos Lanang and Bahdoo Rachman, who were in fact assigned to Gibson by the Dutch Assistant Resident at Palembang De Vries. (Both men immediately alerted the Dutch authorities about the letter as soon as it was despatched by Gibson with Graham as the courier.) Belmont then claimed that both the Malay translators were in fact in the pay of the Dutch, and were 'known in Batavia as spies of the police' (August Belmont, letter to F.A. van Hall, Hague, 4 March 1854).

68 Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary of State William L. Marcy, 26 May 1854.

69 Katz, p. 47.

related to the case – more than 50 letters, as well as copies of reports, testimonies of witnesses as well as the proceedings of the Dutch court in Batavia – that ran to 136 pages. By then it was clear that neither the American or Dutch governments were about to compromise. And as far as the Dutch government was concerned, the only culprit with whom they had an issue with was Walter Gibson himself, whose account was decidedly gamey. The first mate Charles Graham – whom Gibson had abandoned in prison when he made his own escape on 24 April 1853 – had been pardoned and set free, 'in consideration of his youth and the pernicious influence which Gibson had exercised upon him' and the rest of the crew had been released earlier, on 30 April 1852.[70]

And as for the ill-fated schooner the *Flirt*, the vessel would not weather the crisis well. The American Captain Gorham Bassett, who was in Batavia during the time of Gibson's arrest wrote to him in March 1854 and informed him that the *Flirt* was a tatterdemalion wreck by then, and 'almost worthless – her sails all rotten and everything allowed to go to wreck and ruin; so if they give her back to you, she is not worth your acceptance'.[71] Even if Gibson still wanted to regain possession of his dilapidated tub, she was no longer his to have: In his letter to the American envoy dated 7 July 1854 Minister Van Hall stated that the *Flirt* had not been confiscated as Gibson had alleged, but rather 'placed under custody'. In Gibson's absence the *Flirt* was auctioned off to the public. Van Hall added that the ship had been 'purchased by an Arab' for the sum of 4,110 f., and that the rest of the payment – 3,400 f. after deducting all expenses – had been deposited in the orphans' court of Batavia, 'and is still there at your disposal' if Gibson was inclined to sail all the way to Java to collect it. The Minister added that the ship was never worth 50,000 dollars as Gibson had claimed, and that the Dutch government was certainly not about to entertain Gibson's demand for an extra 50,000 dollars for his time in prison; for he himself was heard to have said that 'prison life was good'.[72]

With his crew scattered across the globe and his ship sold to an Arab merchant, maudlin Gibson was a captain in name only. Though he persisted in his appeals to the American government to the very end – he wrote to the American envoy August Belmont in late September 1854, even when it was clear that there was no hope of winning[73] – no conclusion was in sight in the

70 F.A. van Hall, letter to A. Belmont, Hague, 29 June 1854.

71 G.F. Bassett, letter to W. M. Gibson, Boston, 18 March 1854.

72 F.A. van Hall, letter to A. Belmont, Hague, 29 June 1854.

73 Walter M. Gibson, letter to August Belmont, Washington, DC, 29 September 1854.

Dickensian drama of defamatory hearsay and battered reputations. In his final letter to Belmont at The Hague, Secretary Marcy simply complemented the envoy for he had 'done promptly and faithfully' his duty, though it was clear that the cause was a lost one.[74]

Gibson had ranted and railed about how 'the fabric of injustice created in the Eastern Archipelago would fall without a blow with the first spirited assertion of the liberal principles' that he regarded as thoroughly American. But the American government was not alone when it came to having to deal with the rotten apples that made their way to Southeast Asia. Britain had to contend with its own charlatans and scallywags, as did France – as Muller has shown in his study of how the French colonial government in Indochina was embarrassed by the 'bad Frenchmen' who let their side down and failed to live up to the ideal of the upright European in the East.[75]

Though he fumed at length about how he was mistreated at the hands of the Dutch, Gibson neglected to consider how his own government had treated foreigners meddling in American politics then and before: General (and later President) Andrew Jackson had no issues whatsoever when it came to executing Europeans who tried to assist the Seminole Indians in their struggle against American expansionism in the past.[76] But if Gibson was foolish enough to attempt what he did, he may have been emboldened by America's filibustering exploits abroad before his time. During Jackson's Presidency the American government had negotiated a treaty with Turkey that included a secret clause allowing American citizens – without official sanction – to offer their services to the Turkish government covertly, to help design ships and train crews for the Turkish Navy.[77] And other Americans had likewise engaged in hijinks of a similar nature: The notorious Yankee filibuster, William Walker, had been even more audacious, after leading his motley crew (dubbed 'The Immortals') to Nicaragua in 1855 and attempting to create his own Central American republic based on slavery and ruled only by white men.[78] Gibson, however, failed to secure the backing of his own government, and with not even a canoe under his command, was no

74 William Learned Marcy, letter to August Belmont, Washington, DC, 3 October 1854.

75 See Muller.

76 Herring has noted that Jackson had captured the Scottish merchant Alexander Arbuthnot and the English mercenary, Richard Armbrister, during the Seminole campaign in Florida. Jackson had both men executed immediately, and the Scotsman Arbuthnot was hanged from the yardarm of his ship, the *Chance*. By comparison the captain of the *Flirt* got off lightly (Herring, pp. 148-149).

77 Ibid. 2008, p. 168.

78 Ibid. 2008, pp. 219-220.

longer a figure of consequence.[79] Despite the hullaballoo the affair of the *Flirt* was forgotten, and in the following year Gibson would publish *The Prison of Weltevreden*, that would be the only tangible result of the luckless Palembang expedition he led.

5.IV Those who can't do, write fiction: Walter Gibson as American Orientalist

> The Orient becomes a pretext for self-dramatization. [...] It affords endless material for the imagination, and endless potential for the Occidental self.[80]
> – Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions*

Though the affair of the *Flirt* and its commander Walter M. Gibson has largely been forgotten by now, it was, during its time, a complex controversy that touched upon a range of issues from extraterritorial rights to the question of the sovereignty of native states that came under Western colonial rule.

The affair also raises all manner of 'what if' questions, not least of which is what might have happened to Gibson and his crew had he attempted such a stunt in Spanish Philippines or the Burmese and Malay kingdoms that were then being drawn into the orbit of the British Empire. Gibson himself admitted only Englishmen into his pantheon of acceptable non-American heroes, and had spoken highly of East India Company-men like Stamford Raffles and the merchant-turned-adventurer James Brooke, after whom he had modelled himself. But had he attempted to encroach upon the Malay kingdoms that were then in the crosshairs of British empire-builders, he might have triggered an equally embarrassing exchange of letters between Washington and London instead. (Later there would be some Americans who had the temerity to do so, such as the Yankee trader Charles Lee Moses, who almost succeeded in creating an American colony in North Borneo. Moses failed to perform the miracle of parting the sea, but he nearly drove a wedge into American-British relations thanks to his dodgy manoeuvres at the Brunei court.[81])

The damage Gibson did, however slight, was done; and Dutch attitudes towards Americans were hardened as a result. Back in The Hague, the

79 Walter M. Gibson, letter to Secretary Marcy, Washington, DC, 11 November 1854.
80 Kabbani, p. 26.
81 See Tregonning; Keith; and Tatu.

discussions at the States-General momentarily veered to the topic of that young country called the United States of America, and the warning was sounded:

> For old people ought to be circumspect and prudent about the friendship of young people: the former can often raise singular claims. *Countries which possess colonies ought to be especially on their guard as to America*; for we know, or we can know, what America intends in the Indian and Chinese seas.[82]

The Dutch government was perhaps prudent in sounding the alarm about Americans abroad, for America was still a relatively young nation and seemed to be populated by newly-minted Americans who harboured dreams that extended well beyond the shores of their country. Another picaresque character creeping about at the time was the Italian-turned-American Celso Cesare Moreno, who had 'bought a ship and sailed to Sumatra, where he courted the daughter of a sultan and also got into trouble with the Dutch colonial administration'.[83]

Back in America, Walter Gibson's fortunes were running low. Having lost his ship, and without the support of his government, he was a madcap adventurer without means and no place to venture to. Respite came in the year 1855 when *The Prison of Weltevreden* was published and through the publication of the story he was able to reinvent himself yet again: The failed explorer was about to assume the role of benefactor and liberator, bringing civilization to the 'semi-human beings' of Southeast Asia.

Gibson's novel, as we have seen earlier, was a fictional account of the failed expedition to Palembang and Jambi. Though fictional in nature it did adhere to the basic facts of the Palembang expedition, and the progression of the narrative corresponds to his earlier, drier, account of the journey that he had submitted to the American government. The most obvious difference between his earlier account ('The Case of the *Flirt*', 1853) and the novel that he wrote later was the somewhat dramatic and sanctimonious tone that he adopts in the latter: *The Prison of Weltevreden* was 'consecrated to the elevation of the native races of the East Indian Archipelago, in religious truth, in morals, and in social virtues; and to the mitigation of the selfishness and asperity of European domination in the East'.[84] (Needless to say, it was not

82 See 'Proceedings'. Emphasis mine.

83 Adler and Kamins, 'The Political Debut', pp. 104-105; see also Vecoli and Durante.

84 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. i.

intended to edify or please readers in Europe, but like the works of Reynolds, Warriner and Roberts was meant for an American audience back home.)

While in his earlier account Gibson's focus was upon himself and his sufferings, in his novel he directed his gaze beyond himself and wrote about the condition of life among the natives of the East. In the novel he recounted his travels into the interior of Sumatra, where he encountered 'semi-human beings', 'visiting them at their homes, partaking of their hospitality, studying their literature, and observing their religion, laws, social customs and habits',[85] before he was 'interrupted by the jealousy of Dutch officials'.[86] He did admit that in his narrative 'truth had been adhered to, but not in the naked form of daily occurrence', and that 'the romantic beauty and poetic life of [the] Indian isles is arrayed in the vesture of an Eastern story'; while 'some names have been changed, of persons who still live in the presence of power, that might look with disfavour on the parts they enacted'.[87] But Gibson's stated aim was to 'open up new regions of thought and feeling, and in presenting real pictures of Oriental character, to point out new avenues to the Oriental mind; to show forth child-like races claiming by their simplicity, docility, obedience and truthfulness, the highest paternal care of a superior civilization'.[88]

The 'Oriental mind' that Gibson tried to picture in his novel was the mind of the Sumatrans he met, and as we have seen earlier Gibson's portrayal of the Sumatrans was one that disabled them as well: The people of Palembang were described as weak, dependent and helpless, and their ruler a king with no power, anxiously awaiting deliverance from some higher force that could liberate them from the clutches of the Dutch – and which happened to be none other than the Americans.[89]

The repetitive trope of the helpless native Other – so crucial to the Orientalist enterprise and so familiar by the nineteenth century – informs Gibson's work and is the premise upon which the entire story rests. The tale is that of an American abroad, who had arrived in Southeast Asia to help civilize the native Other; and to protect those very same natives from other Westerners who had failed in their moral task of bringing civilization to the non-Western world. As in the work of Roberts that we have looked at

85 Ibid., p. v.
86 Ibid., p. v.
87 Ibid., p. vi.
88 Ibid., p. vii.
89 Ibid., p. 128.

in the previous chapter, here we see the complex compartmentalization of the world into three distinct groupings: the upright American, the poor uncivilized natives, and the nefarious Westerners of Old World Europe who have failed in their duty to bring justice and enlightenment to non-Caucasians, for:

> These, *like our Indians in America*, like Africans, like every other people not Caucasians, *are looked upon as born bad and designed by Providence to remain so*; and to be used or abused, according to the interest or whim of the superior race. When they shall be treated with a parental kindness and forbearance, with some love and patience, *as though dealing with children*; acting firmly and without suspicion; showing that you seek their interest as well as your own; giving them no poison; giving them good advice and faithful protection; then I am sure they would repay with the love and fidelity of children; *for all these races seem glad to look up to the white man. He is indeed their superior, and should be their affectionate elder brother.*[90]

The second half of *The Prison of Weltevreden* reads as a catalogue of the abuses meted out upon Gibson as well as the unfortunate prisoners of the gaol. Though Gibson's narrator was the object of constant admiration among the natives – by virtue of 'being so fanciful a personage' and considered so important that the locals believed he 'stood near the Rajah of America when back home'[91] – prison life proved to be horrible. The prisoners were beaten and whipped by 'two huge African guards',[92] while routine inspections, interrogations and executions took place.

During his stay at Weltevreden the narrator encounters a host of natives, from the child-like Umbah, who was entirely dependent on her protector and benefactor the Dutch Baron,[93] to an assortment of local criminals. The narrator was forced to 'share the fare of eastern slaves, the companionship of mongrel felons', and to listen to 'the howls of torture and madness resounding daily in their ears'.[94] (Mongrels and half-castes were another category

90 Ibid., pp. 132-133. Emphasis mine.

91 Ibid., p. 192.

92 Ibid., pp. 262-263.

93 Ibid., pp. 266-278. The Dutch Baron, whose misdeeds had landed him in the same prison as the narrator, was one of the very few Dutchmen who 'expressed great friendliness towards Americans', and he had offered to purchase the *Flirt* that was then lying idle by the docks of Batavia (ibid., p. 284).

94 Ibid., pp. 295-296.

of native types that apparently attracted Gibson's attention. Elsewhere in the story he wrote at length about the deformed and wild-looking African-Portuguese Pirez, whose brutish utterances were barely understood by anybody.[95])

With little to do and nowhere to run to, the narrator took upon himself the task of trying to speak with the native prisoners around him, and to understand 'the primitive and poetic minds of the peoples of these islands'.[96] In his conversations with the warrior from Celebes (Sulawesi) named Wongso, the narrator spoke 'with the simplest of words', so as to enter 'the innermost recesses of the barbarian soul'.[97] Wongso recounted his personal life story, and explained how he ended up being accused of murder and sentenced to death. In the final hours before his execution, the narrator attempted to 'rouse up the dull barbarian mind, an apathetic, semi-pagan, Mahometan soul' by reading to Wongso parts of the Old Testament.[98]

Gibson saw no merit or purpose to the Dutch legal system and the punishments that were meted out by the court in the colony, for he felt that none of these laws or institutions had managed to penetrate 'the Oriental mind' and improve native society at all. Rather:

> We have sat down at the outskirts, the outports of the Oriental mind and character; where we have been content to erect the stiff forms of our own rigid, common-sense temperate clime, waiting for the dreamy, imaginative Oriental to come to us. He has not come; he has felt nothing at the hands of the European, but a harsh manifestation of supremacy of skill and intellectual power, his sympathetic nature has revolted at this; the avenues, which reach him, have been closed; and the hundreds of millions in the East pass away, uninfluenced to the slightest extent by European dominion and enlightenment.[99]

The passage above sums up Gibson's view of racial difference and race relations in the European colonies of Southeast Asia, and explains in part his own support for a different kind of enlightened intervention on the part of America. The native characters in the story – Umbah, Wongso,

95 Ibid., pp. 297-301.
96 Ibid., p. 393.
97 Ibid., pp. 391-392.
98 Ibid., pp. 394-395.
99 Ibid., p. 399.

Pirez and all the 'eastern slaves and mongrel felons' – are presented as 'dreamy imaginative Orientals' whose 'primitive and poetic minds' were unable to understand and appreciate the workings of institutional law and the colonial state. Believing that America was a different kind of Western nation altogether – Western, but not European; republican, rather than monarchical – he called for America to play a more active role in Southeast Asia as the promoter of Enlightenment and Christian values.

It was here, in the fictional dialogues and encounters between the narrator and the native prisoners that Gibson develops the neat and exclusive boundaries between the Dutch colonizers, their native subjects and the American as victim-and-liberator. Inviting his American readers to accompany the narrator as he discovered the 'Oriental mind', Gibson also turned their attention to the Dutch, who were cast in terms wholly negative. Once again the reader who is familiar with the work of Raffles (*The History of Java*, 1817) would recognize the same discursive strategy at work: The natives of Java and the archipelago are framed as childlike and trusting, though their trust is betrayed by the Dutch, who are framed as the exploiters of native land and labour. For Gibson is was not enough for America to simply be a republic and to shine the light of liberty as a beacon for the world to see. In both his narrative and his actions in Sumatra, Gibson called for a more proactive, muscular assertion of American liberalism that recalled the Jeffersonian dream of an *Empire of Liberty*. And such an empire would surely not build itself through wishful thinking, but required active intervention on the part of the nation he belonged to, and for whose support he called upon.

It was this belief in the American promise that lent Gibson's fictional work its somewhat missionary, almost crusading tone and tenor. America, for him, was a nation endowed with a mission of its own, and to falter in the face of that moral responsibility would bring America down to the level of the European nations that had grown corrupt thanks to their worship of Mammon. From 1855 to 1860 Gibson the failed adventurer refashioned himself into an advocate of the American cause, and travelled around the United States delivering talks about his experience while promoting his book. After having lost Sumatra Gibson found God instead, and came into the fold of the Mormon Church. Gibson's career might have ended there, as he toured the cities of America spinning embroidered tales of rich lands in the East being despoiled by the ravenous empires of Old World Europe. But he was destined for another jaunt to the Pacific, and by the end of the final chapter of his life would be transformed yet again into something entirely different and unexpected: A defender of native rights, standing up against 'American imperialism'.

5.V The filibuster's demise: Gibson's final Pacific adventure

> As for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts.[100]
> – Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

A life as extraordinary as Walter Gibson's could only have ended in an equally bizarre way; and the man whose adventurous career began as a promoter of American republicanism and liberalism was destined to end his days as a defender of native rights and an opponent of American expansionism. Gibson's eventual disillusionment with the United States was probably the result of the failure of his case against the Dutch colonial authorities. Early clues to this shift in his character can be found in his work *The Prison of Weltevreden*, which was published after the affair of the *Flirt* was closed. In the story the narrator-prisoner lamented his isolation and abandonment at the hands of the Dutch, while fuming at the 'political sharks at Washington, whether Whig or t'other', whose only concerns were their own political fortunes: 'What do they care about honour abroad? They are only thinking of keeping on the soft side of the pork-raisers, nigger-drivers, and timber-choppers who put them were they are.'[101]

That sense of betrayal had apparently cut rather deep, and later the prisoner-narrator declared that 'I would rather go abroad, anytime, with a British passport, than one of my own government; and I am not the first to say it.'[102] Though he bemoaned his sorry lot at the hands of the Dutch, Gibson had stated on several occasions that he was let down by his fellow Americans, such as the American consul Alfred Reed – who had declared that America had too many fanatics in the country and that insurrectionists should be hanged immediately[103] – and Commodore Aulick of the US Navy's East India Squadron – who stated that he was not able to leave Canton to go about rescuing Americans in Dutch jails.[104] Nor was Gibson helped by the American Resident in Singapore, Joseph Balestier, who was an admirer of the British adventurer James Brooke, but did not see Gibson in the same heroic light.[105]

100 Melville, *Moby-Dick*, p. 6.
101 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. 303.
102 Ibid., p. 304.
103 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
104 Ibid., p. 9.
105 America's Resident in Singapore Joseph Balestier had written in defence of the Englishman James Brooke – whose exploits in Borneo had been the subject of much controversy and who had been accused of plunder and the slaughter of innocent natives. But it is doubtful if the

Gibson's spirit was not broken and he did travel abroad again; and Adler and Kamins have recounted the rest of his story.[106] Following the publication of *The Prison of Weltevreden* Gibson was able to recover his losses by collecting royalties from the book.[107] Despite the fact that he had ventured to Sumatra without knowing a single word of Malay, and that he had spent most of his time in Southeast Asia staring at the walls of his prison cell in Batavia, he was able to fashion himself into a believable expert on things Asiatic. Having lost his case, Gibson turned to God for succour. He would join the Church of Latter-day Saints and persuade the leader of the Church, Brigham Young, to let him establish a Mormon colony in the Pacific. Almost a decade after his ill-fated Sumatran venture, Gibson headed out once more, and headed to Hawaii in the year 1861 as a representative of the Mormon Church.

Yet again the indefatigable Gibson met with adversity: In 1864 he was excommunicated from the Church on the grounds of exploiting his office and selling titles; and he moved to Honolulu in 1872. During his stay in Hawaii he made the effort to learn the local language, and established a small bilingual newspaper, *The Nuhou* (The messenger). Gibson never gave up on his dream of having political influence, and managed to secure for himself the post of commercial agent to King Kamehamena V (r. 1863-1872), with the grand plan of importing migrant workers from Southeast Asia to work in Hawaii. Gibson's star rose with the ascendancy of King Kalakaua (r. 1874-1891), and he managed to get himself elected to the Hawaiian Assembly.[108] He then underwent yet another transformation of his character: The young Walter Gibson had spoken and written at length about America's civilizing role in Asia, but the older Gibson was now a Pacific islander, and began to speak about the danger of Western intervention (including American intervention) in Pacific affairs. He was particularly worried about the pro-American natives and settlers in Hawaii who were trying to persuade the King to allow America to annex the pacific kingdom, as Adler and Kamins noted:

Resident could have done much for Gibson anyway, as he was close to the end of his stay in Singapore. In 1852 Balestier resigned his post, after his claim for a higher salary had been refused by the American government. He would return to America in poor health, and died in York, Pennsylvania, in 1858 (Hale, pp. 332-333). See: Joseph Balestier, 'Mr. Brooke of Sarawack', *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, vol. 18, New York, January 1848, pp. 56-60.

106 Adler and Kamins, 'The Political Debut'; Adler and Kamins, *The Fantastic Life*.

107 Adler and Kamins, 'The Political Debut', p. 114n1.

108 King David Kalakaua negotiated the American-Hawaii Reciprocity Treaty of 1875, which allowed the Americans to use Ford island as their base for seven years.

> Gibson saw as the essential agenda for the kingdom [the] preservation of the [Hawaiian] race by improving their health and by inter-marriage with new stock from other Pacific islands; preservation of Hawaiian autonomy by inculcating pride in the monarchy and holding off the 'Americanizers' who sought annexation to the U.S.[109]

But the fate of Hawaii had been decided long before Gibson arrived there, and from the time of the Tyler Doctrine (1842) it was clear that the Pacific island group would eventually come under American influence. American merchants were keen to invest in Hawaii and build their sugar plantations, while the US Navy was looking for a base to call their own in the middle of the Pacific. From the 1850s, scores of American Protestant missionaries – funded by Protestant groups back home – had been sent there, in an effort to push out the Catholic priests sent from France. In 1851 King Kamehameha III had brokered a special arrangement with the American government, stipulating that in the event of an attack by a European power Hawaii's sovereignty would be surrendered to America.[110]

Gibson found himself at odds with other Europeans and Americans – including Celso Moreno, who had also attempted an equally foolish venture in Sumatra as Gibson did – who wanted to open up Hawaii to Western capital penetration. Gibson was later appointed to King Kalakaua's inner council where for the first time he enjoyed political power. He would later be conferred the title of Knight Companion in the Royal Order of Kalakaua (in 1881), and despite the attacks on him by his opponents – who raised the issue of his imprisonment in Batavia to besmirch his reputation – he won at the elections of 1882 and was made Minister of Foreign Affairs. Shortly before his death, Walter Gibson was elevated to the post of Prime Minister of Hawaii by the King himself, though his ill-concocted plan to create a vast Pacific empire with Hawaii at its centre led to his dismissal the very next year.[111] He returned to the United States a penniless man, and died in San Francisco in 1888. King Kalakaua would pass away three years later in January 1891, spending his final days in San Francisco while lamenting the impending demise of his kingdom. Hawaii would come

109 Adler and Kamins, 'The Political Debut', p. 99.

110 Herring, pp. 208-209.

111 Just how Gibson could have imagined that Hawaii would be able to become a maritime power in the Pacific remains unclear: The kingdom's small army was made up of six companies of regular infantry volunteers, including the King's Guard and the Queen's Guard companies. Hawaii's diminutive navy consisted of only one steam powered gunboat, the 6-gun HHMS *Kaimiloa*. (See Haley).

under the influence of the United States, but at a cost to its people and their culture.[112]

The phrase 'you can't make this up' is often bandied about today, but the life of Walter Murray Gibson – the American whom nobody wanted, and who later did not want America himself – was so singular that it deserves to be regarded as truly unique. The greatest irony of Gibson's life was the fact that his effort to protect Hawaii from the clutches of the United States was ultimately foiled by American colonizers and filibusters who, in the end, succeeded in doing precisely what he had failed to do in Sumatra decades earlier.[113]

Walter Gibson's story – outlandish though it was in so many ways – tells us something about America's role and place in Southeast Asia in the mid-nineteenth century. His adventures in Southeast Asian waters remind us that even in the nineteenth century the South China Sea was hardly an 'open space' where freedom of navigation was an absolute right for everyone. The Dutch were fiercely protective of their maritime territory; and Gibson's arrest and the loss of his vessel points to the fact that as far as the government of the Dutch East Indies was concerned, the waters around southern Sumatra were not an open area for dilettantes to sail wherever they pleased. This in turn should remind us of the fact that by the nineteenth century the maritime territory of Southeast Asia was already neatly demarcated and policed by the various colonial powers – Britain, Holland, Spain, Portugal and France – that regarded the coastlines and straits adjacent to their colonies as part of their territory as well.

Gibson may have fancied himself as an adventurer bringing enlightenment to the further corners of the earth, but in truth such romantic figures were rare: James Brooke had succeeded only because he managed to court the support of the British Navy, and would never have been able to build a kingdom of his own in Sarawak without the aid of British arms. Gibson, on the other hand, was a rogue agent who acted on his own without sanction

112 See Bushnell.

113 In 1887, Pearl Harbor was leased to the Americans, but a group of American residents – who retained American citizenship but had voting rights in Hawaii – formed the Hawaiian Patriotic League and rebelled against the king. With the help of the militia they funded, the Americans forced King Kalakaua to consent to the June 1887 constitution – dubbed the 'Bayonet Constitution' – which compelled him to sack his cabinet and accept their demands, weakening his power even further. Kalakaua's sister Liliuokalani later ascended the throne as the Queen of Hawaii, but was overcome by a second revolt in 1893. Hawaii was formally annexed by America on 7 July 1898. In 1959 Hawaii was made a state of the US, and it was only during the Clinton administration that the American government formally recognized America's role in the forceful annexation of Hawaii. See Bushnell; Trask.

from his own country, and was ultimately left to hang and dry when it became painfully obvious that his cause was a lost one.

Notwithstanding his failure in the Palembang venture, Gibson did leave behind a book that in many ways captures the *zeitgeist* of the time: His *Prison of Weltevreden*, replete as it was with time-tested tropes, stereotypes and clichés of the exotic East, populated by servile natives awaiting liberation at the hands of the superior races, was typical of the kind of Orientalist fiction at the time. Gibson certainly did not invent Orientalism, or theories of racial difference; but in the manner in which his narrative divided the world into neat ethno-racial groups ordered according to a hierarchy he repeated many of the common pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference then. What makes *The Prison of Weltevreden* a work of *American Orientalism* is the manner in which America and Americans are presented as a category apart; equidistantly juxtaposed to both the 'child-like races' of Southeast Asia and the rapacious Europeans of the Old World.

However much American sensibilities may have been offended by the realities of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, there was little that could be done to alter the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century Southeast Asia was, for all intents and purposes, a domain that had been carved up and shared among only a handful of West European powers – and America was not part of that charmed circle of empire-builders. For curious Americans driven by wanderlust and still drawn to Southeast Asia, it was safer to go looking for seashells instead.

6 It is your shells I am after

Albert S. Bickmore's voyage to the East Indies and America's coming of age

Civilization is the way one's own people live.
Savagery is the way foreigners live.[1]
– Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*

6.I From antebellum to post-Civil War United States: Another America rises

Americans think of themselves as peace-loving, but few nations have had as much experience at war as the United States.[2]
– George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*

The 1860s was a tumultuous decade for America, and by the end of it America would emerge as a nation whose identity was defined by industry, free trade and wider ambitions in the Pacific. But at the beginning of the decade America seemed to be a country that was deeply divided. America's expansion all the way to the Pacific coast had been a speedy affair, rendered all the faster thanks to the tools of the industrial revolution like the railway system and the telegraph. The eastern states of America were linked to Europe and South America through networks of trade that were smooth and rapid, but in the South there remained the states whose economies were geared towards cotton production and where slavery was still in place. In 1839 Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimké's *American Slavery As It Is* was published, and in 1849 Josiah Henson – after having fled America – published *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada*. When Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly* in 1852, her novel sold more than a million copies in America and Britain, boosting the abolitionist cause.

The victory of Abraham Lincoln in the elections of November 1860 marked the turning point. The Republican Party had come to power for the first time, and for the slave owners of the South this meant the impending end of slavery. Seven states in the South whose economies were based on slavery

1 Butler, p. 96.
2 Herring, pp. 1-2.

formed a confederacy of their own even before Lincoln's inauguration. While neither the outgoing Democrat President James Buchanan (1857-1861) nor incoming President Lincoln (1861-1865) wanted the United States to split apart, war seemed inevitable after Confederate forces opened fire on Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861. For the next four years the United States would be at war with itself.[3]

Throughout the conflict the Republican-led American government did not recognize the Confederacy as a separate state, but as rebels who had deserted the Union. The Confederate government had hoped to gain recognition from the powers of Europe, thanks to their production of cotton, which had been the mainstay of their exports. But despite sporadic attempts by some European (notably British) merchants to break the Union Navy's blockade of the Southern states with their faster, propeller-driven blockade runners, no European government formally recognized the Confederacy as a sovereign state in its own right.[4] Lincoln's Secretary of State, William H. Seward, had made it abundantly clear that the American government would take action against any foreign power that recognized the Confederacy, or attempted to help it in any way – thus presenting the Civil War as an internal problem for America to handle. 'King Cotton' had lost the war for the South, while the Northern states continued to modernize and industrialize at a spectacular rate. Instead of coming to the aid of the southern Confederacy the European powers – principally France, Britain and Spain – intervened in Mexico instead, as France's ill-fated Mexican Adventure began in 1861. (The brief reign of Emperor Maximillian who was supported by France would come to a messy end in 1867.)

The Civil War would drag on for four long years; and ferocious battles would be fought at places like Fredericksburg and Gettysburg. The 'Draft Riots' in New York City in July 1863 – which led to 2,000 civilians injured and more than a hundred killed as white working-class men and women protested against the draft passed by Congress, and vented their anger against free black citizens in particular – showed how unpopular the war had become.[5] A lesser-known clash took place at Whitehall in December 1862, and among the Union troops commanded by Major-General John Foster was a scholar named Albert Smith Bickmore, who was a member of the 44th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers. Though casualties were reported to be high, Bickmore survived the clash and later returned to Harvard to pursue his studies in natural history under the tutelage of scholars like

3 See Donald, Baker and Holt; Jones; McPherson.

4 See Canney.

5 Roberts, 'New York Doesn't Care'.

Professor Louis Agassiz – the author of *Critical Studies on Fossil Molluscs* and an ardent anti-Darwinist who forwarded the theory of polygenesis, claiming that blacks and whites do not share the same origins – and as we shall see later he was destined to play a bigger role in the building of the post-Civil War America to come.

It should be remembered that throughout the conflict the United States did not cease to be, and that notwithstanding the troubles at home the American government did not relent in pursuing its ambitions abroad either. America did not take a break from its dream of being a Pacific power, and even in the midst of conflict on home soil, did not falter in its attempts to reach out to the Far East and the Indies.

In the same year that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and the Union and Confederate armies clashed at Gettysburg (1-3 July 1863), America's navy would be drawn into another conflict in Asia: In January 1863 Japan's Emperor Komei had declared that Japan would expel all foreigners from its territory, despite the fact that Japan had signed several treaties with some European states as well as the United States of America (The Treaty of Kanagawa of 1854 – see Appendix C). The Emperor's call was met by Lord Mori Takachika, the *daimyo* of the Choshu clan; and Lord Takachika then ordered the closure of the Shimonoseki Strait to all foreign ships. Following an attack on the American merchant ship the *Pembroke*, the American propeller-driven sloop-of-war USS *Wyoming* was ordered to engage with the Choshu forces. (Ironically the forces under Lord Takachika were armed and equipped with ships and guns that had been gifted to them by the Americans.) The *Wyoming* emerged victorious, after having sunk two of the Japanese vessels and damaging the steamer. For the Americans the Shimonoseki campaign of 1863-1864 was instructive in many ways: It demonstrated the importance of having a larger fleet that could protect American shipping in foreign waters even when the homeland was in a state of political crisis, and the fact that at that time America was still unable to mobilize enough firepower at sea to protect its commercial shipping abroad. (American stores were destroyed during the unrest.) They were living in the era of gunboat diplomacy, but America simply did not have enough gunboats.

By the end of the American Civil War in May 1865 (the last shot was fired on 22 June), America was a country redefined. Though General Ulysses S. Grant wrote that 'this war was a fearful lesson, and should teach us the necessity of avoiding wars in the future', America's martial adventurism was far from over.[6] As Bellah has noted, the tone and tenor of America's political

6 Grant, *The Personal Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 187.

discourse was changed somewhat in the wake of the conflict, and 'with the Civil War, a new theme of death, sacrifice, and rebirth entered the new civil religion'.[7] Reconstruction would soon follow – that was accompanied by a host of compromises and concessions in order to appease the defeated South – and America was ready to step on to the stage of world affairs as a country reborn and eager to prove itself. But post-Civil War reconstruction did not lead to a miraculous change in popular prejudice towards those who were not white in America. Despite attempts to promote civil rights by progressive-minded reformers, the freed slaves of the South were still subjected to institutionalized forms of discrimination and segregation during the era of the Jim Crow laws.[8] White Americans from North and South would be reunited in the project of nation-building, but America needed a constitutive Other to define itself against as well. America would develop in tandem with Western Europe at a time when pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference and racial hierarchies were deemed respectable subjects of study by scholars like the French naturalist Georges Cuvier, the Scotsman Robert Knox and the American biologist-geologist Louis Agassiz. As Whitman has argued the same theories would later be applied to other non-white migrant communities (such as the Chinese) and paved the way for the rise of America's race laws in decades to come.[9]

It was against this backdrop of a resurgent, though not-entirely-new, United States that the country and its leaders sought to project American influence abroad. By the end of the Civil War America had grown as West Virginia and Nevada entered the union. The American government continued to encourage American merchants who were trading in Southeast Asia, China, Korea and Japan. And like Japan that would soon come under the rule of the Meiji emperor and undergo the Meiji reforms in order to become a modern 'civilized' nation in the mould of Western Europe, America was equally keen to show that it belonged to the club of developed civilized nations.

Civilized nations need civilizing institutions, and America was not to be left behind: The American Antiquarian Society was founded in 1812, the Boston Society of Natural History was formed in 1830, and the American Oriental Society (with its library at Yale University) was founded in 1842. The American Ethnological Society was also set up in New York in the same

7 Bellah, pp. 1-21.

8 Among those who forwarded the agenda for universal civil rights were reformers like Charles Sumner and Benjamin Butler, who proposed the Civil Rights Act in 1875, but the act was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court a decade later.

9 See Whitman.

year; and the American Geographical Society in 1851, in the same city. In 1852 the American Society of Civil Engineers was set up in Reston, Virginia, while the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would be founded in New York in 1866, modelled on Britain's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. New York was evidently becoming the cosmopolitan centre of the country, with all kinds of artistic, scientific and philanthropic associations popping up around every other corner. But the city still lacked one thing: a museum of natural history that it could be proud of. And building such a museum was precisely the ambition of the Dartmouth- and Harvard-trained natural scientist Albert S. Bickmore.

Our interest in Albert Bickmore lies in how he saw himself as an American scientist out to prove to the world that America was as developed a country as any other Western nation, and why he felt that the United States needed to have a collection of natural history specimens that could rival any of those in Europe. After serving his brief stint in the Union Army during the Civil War he turned from cannon shells to seashells instead, and it was his love of malacology that took him away from New York all the way to the Dutch East Indies, in search of the rarest shells that could be found. The result of this expedition was his work *Travels in the East Indian Archipelago* (1869),[10] published in the same year as Alfred Russel Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* (1869),[11] and which placed him in that part of Southeast Asia where Stamford Raffles and John Crawfurd had made their mark. But Bickmore's work reveals much more than the natural history of seashells, and tells us quite a lot about how he saw his place, and the place of his country, in the world then.

6.II All for the sake of knowledge: Bickmore's Scientific Jaunt across the Dutch East Indies

> It is not true to assert that men living in democratic ages are naturally indifferent to science, literature, and the arts; only it must be acknowledged that they cultivate them after their own fashion.[12]
> – Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Americans had collected all manner of things during their trips to Southeast Asia, including animals. Warriner had noted that by the time the USS

10 See Bickmore.
11 See Wallace.
12 Tocqueville, p. 40.

Potomac made its way to Java the frigate was practically a floating zoo; with a bear, baboon, monkey, dog and assorted birds of all kinds accompanying the crew, recreating 'the confusion of Babel' on board. But Bickmore's venture was perhaps the most organized, systematic and well-planned.[13]

Born in St George, Maine, in 1839 Albert Smith Bickmore – American conchologist and teetotaller[14] – had travelled to Southeast Asia in search of shells. As he noted in the preface of his *Travels*, his intention was to travel to the Spice Islands 'to re-collect the shells figured in Rumphius' *Rariteit Kamer'*,[15] though he was worried that upon his arrival in the Dutch colony he might be refused permission to travel any further than Batavia.[16] That the Dutch authorities might prove hostile to his request was understandable, considering the scandal that Walter Gibson had caused more than a decade earlier. The tone and tenor of American-Dutch relations had cooled down somewhat by then, aided perhaps by the constant delivery of ice from Boston to Batavia, by American ships that ventured there every year.[17] Bickmore had been fastidious in his preparation, cramming his cases with 'copper cans with screw covers', nets, hooks and all manner of scientific equipment, but the one thing he needed above all was the Governor-General's permit to travel across the Dutch territories.[18]

The American vessel *Memnon* brought Bickmore all the way to Batavia, and he arrived on 19 April 1865 – four days after the death of President

13 Warriner, *Cruise*, pp. 122-123.

14 Bickmore noted that the Dutchmen he encountered were surprised by the fact that he neither smoked nor drank, for 'cigars and gin are generally regarded as indispensable things to perfect happiness' in the East Indies (pp. 32-33).

15 Bickmore's idol Rumphius (George Everard Rumpf) had published the first work on molluscs that divided shells into different categories – *Polyplacophora, Gastropoda* and *Bivalvia*. Bickmore explained in his work that Rumphius' impressive collection of shells were originally housed in the Museum of Leiden, but during the Napoleonic Wars the Netherlands had come under Napoleon's rule, and many of Rumphius' precious shells had been moved to Paris. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars Rumphius' seashells were scattered all over Europe, and could no longer be studied properly. It was to address this catastrophic academic crisis that Bickmore vowed to travel all the way to the East Indies, with the hope of being able to reconstitute the lost collection of Rumphius, and to build an equally impressive collection for America.

16 Bickmore noted that 'before I left America, Senator Sumner, as Chairman of our Committee on Foreign Relations, kindly gave me a note of warm commendation to the representatives of the foreign powers; and Mr. J.G.S. van Breda, the secretary of the Society of Sciences in Holland, with whom I had been in correspondence, gave me a kind note to Baron Sloet van de Beele, the Governor-General of Netherlands India. I immediately addressed a note to His Excellency, enclosing these credentials' (pp. 28-29).

17 Ibid., p. 31.

18 Ibid., p. 41.

Lincoln. Bickmore could not have known that America's 'counterpart to Mill, Cobden and Bright' had been assassinated, but at the time was anxious to learn of his own impending fate.[19] (Andrew Johnson was then the seventeenth President of the United States, having assumed office on 15 April.)

It was in a European boarding house in Batavia that he waited for a reply from the Dutch Governor-General Van de Beele (Ludolph Anne Jan Wilt, Baron Sloet van de Beele). His narrative begins with his stay in Batavia, where he presents the reader with a comprehensive account of Java's history from the time of Marco Polo up to the period of Dutch colonial rule.[20] Unlike Walter Gibson's romanticized view of Sumatra that seemed to have been conjured from his own fevered imaginings, Bickmore's historical tour of Java was credible and made sense. (He constantly reminded his readers that his was a piece of *academic* writing, where accuracy mattered most and it was written with 'scrupulous care'.[21]) He explained why it was so important for him to seek the shells of Ambon:

> It was partly to restore Rumphius's specimens, and *partly to bring into our own country such a standard collection,* that I was going to search myself for the shells figured in the 'Rariteit Kamer' [chamber of rarities].[22]

Here Bickmore made clear his subject-position in no uncertain terms: He was an American, conscious of the fact that he was in Dutch colonial territory, and on a mission to bring back to America a collection of seashells as worthy as any of the collections to be found in Europe. And if Leiden could boast of having the most impressive collection of seashells from the East Indies, then America was not to be outdone and deserved to have the best too. The American readers he addressed could rest assured that he would do whatever was necessary to ensure that such a sterling collection would be brought 'into our own country' as well.

Thankfully for Bickmore he was granted permission by the Governor-General to proceed on to Ambon and travel across the rest of the Archipelago.[23] He set off immediately, and on 29 June reached Ambon where,

19 Fornieri and Gabbard, p. 19.

20 Bickmore, pp. 21-26.

21 Ibid., p. i. Emphasis mine.

22 Ibid., p. 14.

23 The Governor-General's letter was addressed to all the Dutch Governors across the Archipelago, and stated that 'I have the honour to ask Your Excellency to render to the bearer, Mr. Albert S. Bickmore, who may come into the district under your command, in the interest of science, all the assistance in your power, without causing a charge to the public funds, or

armed with the Governor-General's letter, he was free to scour the island and collect as many shells as he wanted. Bickmore's somewhat obsessive nature was made obvious when he wrote that:

> It was my desire not only to obtain the same shells that Rumphius figures, *but to procure them from the same points and bays*, so that there could be no doubt about the identity of my specimens with his drawings. I therefore proposed to travel along all the shores of Anboina and the neighbouring islands, and trade with the natives of every village, so as to be sure of the localities myself, and, moreover, get specimens of all the species alive, and thus have ample material for the study of their anatomy.[24]

Bickmore was attempting a mimesis of sorts, following exactly in the footsteps of another Western scientist and in so doing reproducing and perpetuating a scientific tradition that was Western. In some ways Bickmore's obsession with accuracy is reminiscent of another meticulous data-collector, John Anderson of the British East India Company, whose fact-finding mission to the East coast of Sumatra we have discussed elsewhere.[25] But Anderson was a loner, and relied almost entirely on his own resources while he was travelling along the coast of Sumatra in the 1820s.[26] Bickmore, on the other hand, was profoundly grateful for 'the letter which His Excellency the Governor-General had honoured me at Batavia'; and was thus able to indulge in his shell-gathering expedition with the help of workers and coolies who were supplied by the Dutch assistant resident at bargain-basement prices. His dependency on the Dutch for support would account for his positive appraisal of Dutch colonial rule across the East Indies, as we shall see later.

In Ambon Bickmore cut a curious figure among the local Ambonese. Common men and Rajahs alike could not comprehend why this American had travelled all the way to their island in search of shells which they regarded as downright ordinary and mundane. But the incredulity cut both ways, as Bickmore was equally unable to understand the fancies and foibles of the Ambonese. At the village of Assilulu he met the local Rajah who was said to possess an immense treasure trove full of wonders:

a burden to the native people' (ibid., p. 40). The Governor-General also offered Bickmore the opportunity to use 'post-horses for free across Java', should he have any intention of travelling to the interior of the island.

24 Ibid., p. 141. Emphasis mine.

25 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

26 See Anderson.

> For some time one of my servants kept alluding to several wonderful and most valuable curiosities which this wealthy Rajah was so fortunate to possess – curiosities indeed, according to his glowing descriptions, compared to the shells I was continually buying.[27]

Bickmore's meeting with the Rajah of Assilulu was one of those encounters that was destined to lead to a failure in cross-cultural communication. He asked if the Rajah would care to show him the treasures that he had heard about, and after some coaxing was shown 'merely half a dozen glass rings'.[28] Bickmore, being a scientist and not a diplomat, was somewhat blunt in his reaction to the Rajah's prizes, and blurted out that there was nothing extraordinary about the rings in the Rajah's collection, maintaining that such glass rings were easily made and commonly found in other parts of Asia. Honest though his reply was, Bickmore had offended the sensibilities of the Rajah and his followers, who maintained that the 'magical rings from Ceram' had been extracted from the bleeding heads of giant serpents. Needless to say, the reaction he received was somewhat frosty, notwithstanding the humid climate:

> A look of surprise and incredulity appeared on the faces of all, and the Rajah at once, in a most solemn manner, averred that so far from their being the work of man, they had been taken out of the heads of snakes and wild boars! Despite the dignified bearing the occasion was supposed to demand, I could not refrain from a smile as I remarked that I had seen many heads of those animals myself, and never before had I heard that they carried such circular jewels in their brains.[29]

It was during such encounters that Bickmore came to form his opinion of the natives of Ambon, whom he thought had 'weak minds' and were not inclined towards scientific enquiry. After consulting the work of Rumphius, whom he so admired, he was certain that:

> This was one of the obstacles in the way of advancement among these people. Rumphius says that many rings were brought by the Portuguese and sold to the natives, who prize them very highly. This accounted for their origin; and afterward, when I came to travel over the empire of China,

27 Bickmore, p. 150.
28 Ibid., p. 151.
29 Ibid., pp. 151-152.

> and noticed how that people value similar rings of jade [nephrite], and remembered the coast of Ceram, opposite Assilulu, was once frequented by the people of that empire, who came to purchase cloves and nutmegs, it occurred to me that possibly it was from them that the Amboinese had learned to place so high a value on such simple objects.[30]

Bickmore's interest in the natives of Ambon and Ceram waned as his excitement over his coveted seashells grew. He was overjoyed to see the Dutch Resident's *Birgos latro* (giant hermit crabs) and was spellbound by the *Tritons* that he managed to purchase at the village of Zyt. At Lariki he avoided the formality of greeting the local chief altogether as he went in search of the little *Cyproea caput-serpentis* (serpent's-head cowry), which had a snake-like appearance. Though at Wakasihu he was grateful to 'the white-bearded Rajah' who had commanded his people to help him gather specimens of 'the richly-coloured *Cassis flammea*' (flame mollusc) and the 'strangely marked *Cyproea mappa*' (map cowry).[31] At Waai he acquired several specimens of the great *Trochus marmoratus* (top-shaped mollusc) – that was 'a favourite ornament for the parlour of every land',[32] and later a *Strombus latissimus* (latissimus conch), which he had 'long been hoping to see'.[33]

After four weeks in Ambon Bickmore then moved on to Ceram, where he continued his work. There he was pleased to get himself a couple of magnificent specimens of the pricey wentletrap (a gastropod mollusc), the famous and highly sought-after *Scalaria preciosa*.[34] Around Saparua Bay he collected plenty of *Clypeastridoe* (sea urchins), as well as *Cyproea moneta* (money-cowries).[35] While at the village of Amet he scooped up plenty of *Mitra episcopalis* (bishop's mitre) and *Mitra Papalis* (pope's mitre) shells.[36]

Along the way Bickmore occasionally glanced at the odd tree or bird, and his narrative also contains detailed descriptions of the types of bananas and breadfruit that he consumed, birds he shot out of the sky and on to his plate, and trees he sheltered under, such as the betel-nut palm *Areca catechu*.[37] So engrossed was Bickmore with his crabs and seashells that human contact seemed perfunctory: He seemed less curious about the people of Ambon

30 Ibid., pp. 152-153.
31 Ibid., pp. 160, 161, 162.
32 Ibid., p. 175.
33 Ibid., p. 176.
34 Ibid., p. 185.
35 Ibid., p. 186.
36 Ibid., pp. 198-199.
37 Ibid., pp. 180-181.

and Ceram than he was about the Javanese, and the only thing that jolted him out of his obsessive labour was an earthquake that literally knocked him off his feet at four in the morning on 23 July.[38] (Though even then, as the earth shook around him, Bickmore remained as alert as ever and noted down the details of the experience. 'The time that elapsed between the hearing of the rumbling noise and feeling the shock itself was about five seconds,' he noted, and it was half an hour before the wind began to blow as before, and the insects were heard again.[39])

The other highlight of Bickmore's stay was his discovery of the forlorn grave of his idol, George Everard Rumpf (1627-1702), whose 'great service to the scientific world' Bickmore hoped to match, if not surpass.[40] He found it by chance, for almost nobody spoke of Rumphius anymore and it was behind the fort of Ambon that he discovered the grave, under the shade of some coffee trees. Satisfied that he had managed to amass a collection of shells that was better than anything Rumphius had put together, Bickmore then prepared for his departure.

On 7 September 1865 Bickmore departed from Ambon and Ceram, and made the long journey back to Batavia, via Banda, Buru, Ternate and the northern peninsula of Celebes (Sulawesi). At Temumpa – in the Minahassa lands – he briefly visited a village of lepers, and 'found it so sickening, even to look at them'.[41] At Kema he boarded the steamship *Menado*, which had delivered him from Batavia to Ambon during the first leg of his journey.[42] By 15 January 1866 he was back at Makassar, and from there the steamship made it way home to Batavia. Bickmore noted that among the passengers on the forward deck was a Bugis woman who had gone amok, and was 'a raving maniac'.[43] But that did not seem to bother Bickmore very much, as he was content in the knowledge that his precious shells were safely stored in his cases.

Bickmore could have made his way home to America as soon as he returned to Batavia, but was aware of the fact that the travel permit that had

38 Ibid., p. 167.

39 Ibid., p. 167. Bickmore did not disguise the fact that he was unnerved by the earthquake, and wrote that 'it was absolutely quiet and it seemed as if all of nature was waiting in dread anticipation of some coming catastrophe'. Later he added that 'I had long since been anxious to witness an earthquake; but since that dreadful night there is something in the very sound of the word that makes me shudder' (p. 167).

40 Ibid., pp. 250-251.

41 Ibid., p. 345.

42 Ibid., p. 377.

43 Ibid., pp. 382-383.

been issued to him by Governor-General van de Beele was valid throughout the Dutch East Indies. With his shells already packed and stored, he then embarked on the second leg of his travels, which brought him to the island of Sumatra.

Though there must have been at least a seashell or two lying about in Sumatra, Bickmore seemed to be satisfied with his collection and did not pursue his interest in shells while he was there. Instead he travelled all the way from Padang to the northern tip of Sumatra, and visited Aceh, the Minangkabau lands, as well as the Batak highlands that he had heard so much about. Here in Sumatra Bickmore was out of his element and relied more on the works of others. His comments about the Bataks and the practice of cannibalism among them were drawn almost entirely from the works of English authors like Raffles and Marsden[44] – though it is interesting to note that he did not, at any point, refer to the work of John Anderson, who had tirelessly argued that cannibalism was no longer practiced by the Bataks as before, and was already dying out by the 1820s.[45]

An American connection was established by Bickmore on several occasions while he was travelling across Sumatra: He noted that two American missionaries – Henry Lyman and Samuel Munson, natives of Massachusetts and graduates of Amherst – had been up to the Batak highlands before him. He then travelled up Sumatra's famous 'pepper coast', and there made mention of the ill-fated American vessel the *Friendship*, which had been captured by the people of Kuala Batu – though it is interesting that Bickmore wrote nothing about the First Sumatran Expedition by the USS *Potomac*, or the second attack on Kuala Batu and Meukek by the USS *Columbia* and USS *John Adams*, or mentioned the accounts of those attacks that were penned by his fellow countrymen Reynolds, Warriner or Taylor.[46] Later while he was making his way down the 'coffee coast' of Sumatra Bickmore was elated to see a 'large and very fine ship that was flying the American ensign' off the coast of Tiku. The sight of the American vessel, built and owned by 'one of the largest and most enterprising firms of Boston', was pleasing to Bickmore's eyes, and he 'hurried to their boarding-place; and at once, we almost felt ourselves back in New England, and forgot that we were far from America, in land of palms, and one long, endless summer'.[47]

44 Ibid., pp. 424-425, 444, 446, 488, 536.
45 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.
46 Ibid., p. 447.
47 Ibid., p. 455.

The final American connection Bickmore made was perhaps the most noteworthy one of all. On his way back to Java, he travelled through Palembang and Jambi, and found himself walking in the footsteps of none other than the infamous Walter Gibson whose misadventure we have looked at in the previous chapter. Bickmore never mentioned Gibson by name, but dryly noted that '[i]t was to this place that the author of *The Prisoner of Weltevreden* came on his filibustering expedition, and was seized and carried to Batavia, whence he escaped.'

Having got on so famously with his Dutch hosts, there was little need for Bickmore to bring up embarrassing episodes from the past – though he clearly knew about Gibson's book, and may have even read it himself. That he concurred with the Dutch view that Gibson was indeed a rabble-rouser and filibuster is telling, and displayed his lack of sympathy for the latter. In any case Gibson was by then far away in Hawaii, engaged in assorted escapades of his own; and Bickmore had gotten what he came for. With his shells packed and stored, he made his way from Sumatra to Java and then made the long final journey home via Singapore (on 24 May 1866) and China.[48] This was, as he recorded, 'my last trip in the tropical East'.[49] Albert Bickmore had voyaged to the East Indies, and he had seen and gathered. But what is interesting to the reader today is what Bickmore *chose to see and chose not to see.* For the manner in which Bickmore reconstructed the world of the Dutch East Indies speaks volumes about how he – the American natural scientist – chose to view the world of native Southeast Asia and the Western presence there.

48 Albert Bickmore's itinerary was as follows:
19 April 1865: Arrival in Batavia.
7 June 1865: Departure from Batavia, to Semarang and Surabaya.
15 June 1865: Departure from Surabaya to Makassar via the Madura Strait.
18 June 1865: Arrival in Sulawesi.
28 June 1865: Crossed the Banda Sea.
29 June 1865: Arrival at Ambon.
17 August 1865: Depart for Nusalaut.
7 September 1865: Departure from Ambon to Banda.
25 September 1865: Travelled on to Buru Island.
12 December 1865: Sailed for Kema.
29 December 1865: In Minahassa land, North Sulawesi.
15 January 1866: Arrival in Makassar.
12 February 1866. Departure from Batavia to Padang.
26 February 1866: Travel to the Batak highlands.
24 May 1866: Depart from Singapore to America, via China.
49 Ibid., p. 542.

6.III 'This indicates their low rank in the human family': Bickmore and the theory of racial difference

> The explorer's text is not epistemologically inventive. It follows a path prescribed by tradition. [...] The novelty resides in the fact that the discourse on 'savages' is, for the first time, a discourse in which an explicit political power presumes the authority of scientific knowledge.[50]
> – V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*

> At the level of ideology, we see translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and under-development.[51]
> – Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto'

It is important to remember that Bickmore was in the Dutch East Indies at a time when the logic of racialized colonial-capitalism was pervasive, and where the colonial economy that the Dutch had developed was one where economic roles were parcelled out to different ethnic groups on the basis of their 'racial development' and standing in the racial hierarchy they had introduced. But scientific racism was certainly not something unique to the Dutch, and conditions back in America were hardly any different then: Bickmore's own professor at Harvard, Louis Agassiz, had argued that different 'races' possessed different qualities and attributes, with some being naturally superior to others. Many of his fellow countrymen were unwilling to accept the idea of universal equality between all human beings, and President Andrew Johnson had vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 after it had been enacted by Congress the year before; while the migration of Chinese workers to the Western state of California led to growing anti-Chinese sentiment out West.[52] The racially segregated world of the Dutch East Indies was not, therefore, entirely alien to Bickmore who hailed from the same land as the natural scientists Samuel George Morton, George Robbins Gliddon, Josiah Nott and Agassiz – proponents of the theory of polygenesis. As Rosen and Bender have shown, nineteenth-century America was a country where theories of racial difference and eugenics were widespread, and had currency among the upper echelons of the political, religious and academic elite.[53]

50 Mudimbe, p. 16.

51 Haraway, p. 291.

52 In 1862 Congress passed the Act to Prohibit the Coolie Trade by American Citizens on American Vessels. What came to be known as the Anti-Coolie Act of 1862 effectively made it impossible for Chinese migrants to obtain American citizenship.

53 See Rosen; Bender.

While in Ambon Bickmore plainly noted that the administrative system was thoroughly racialized, and that at the top of the social order were those who were defined as 'whites'. (Though Bickmore added that 'nine-tenths of the so-called Europeans are really mestizos'.[54]) Then came the second class of natives, called *burgers* (civilians), who were not forced to work in the clove-production industry. Next followed by the third class, or *negorijvolken* (negroes). Finally, the fourth class, essentially slaves, were mostly of Papuan origin.[55] That Bickmore saw nothing wrong in the manner in which racial divisions were introduced and perpetuated through a divisive mode of racialized colonial-capitalism is a reflection of how he was himself a product of the mainly white academic community he belonged to then. His intellectual mentors like Agassiz were themselves proponents of the theory of racial difference, and they were all – directly or indirectly – the inheritors of the same tradition of American ethnography and scientific racism that could be traced back to Samuel Morton (1799-1851), who had argued that the African and Asiatic 'races' were distinct from the white race to which they belonged – an idea that had considerable support both in the slave-owning Southern states of America as it did in the European colonies in Southeast Asia.[56]

As he pottered along collecting his shells, Bickmore classified and categorized them according to a typology based on size, rarity and value. And as he encountered members of the various ethnic groups in the archipelago he likewise organized them according to a typology of 'higher' and 'lower' races. The scientific racism that permeates Bickmore's work was made rather clear at the very beginning of his own writing, where he discusses the behaviour and appearance of the Javanese and Malays whom he met in Java. Bickmore pointed out that the Ambonese, Javanese and Malays were universally shorter than the average European, by a difference of several inches, and that they were 'generally indolent', and have 'an insatiable passion for gambling, which no restrictive or prohibitory law can eradicate'.[57]

The Ambonese and people of Ceram were, for him, a rather simple-minded people who were not scientifically inclined and who did not possess an inquisitive nature at all.[58] He regarded the inhabitants of the islands of

54 Bickmore, pp. 195-196.
55 Ibid., p. 196.
56 See Fredrickson; Robb.
57 Bickmore, p. 33.
58 Ibid., pp. 152-153.

Ambon and Ceram as a 'subdivision' of the Malay race, with perhaps some Papuan influence:

> In height and general appearance they closely resemble the Malays, and evidently form merely a subdivision of the Malay race. Their peculiar characteristics are the darker colour of their skins and of their hair, which, instead of being lank like the Malays, is crisp, but not woolly like that of the Papuans.[59]

In his estimation of their character and nature however, Bickmore seems to have relied mainly on the accounts given to him by the Dutch, and was disparaging in his remarks. He recounts Dutch reports about the alleged treachery of the Ambonese and men of Ceram, and repeats the familiar colonial trope of the warriors of Ceram as head-hunters:

> They are far-famed 'head-hunters'. It is a custom that has become a law among them that every young man must at least *cut off one human head before he can marry*. Heads, therefore, are in great demand, and perhaps our realization of this fact made these frenzied savages appear the more shocking specimens of humanity. The head of a child will meet the inexorable demands of this bloody law, but the head of a woman is preferred, because it is supposed she can more easily defend herself or escape; for the same reason the head of a man is held in higher estimation, and the head of a white man is proof of the greatest bravery, and therefore the most glorious trophy.[60]

While Bickmore criticized the 'frenzied savages' of Ceram and their 'bloody law' he also compared them to other group of 'savages' that he was familiar with, namely the Native Americans of his own country: 'Our North American savages are civilised men compared to these fiends in human form.'[61]

In the worldview of Bickmore there were savages, and there were *savages*. Though he regarded all the natives of the archipelago as being lowly and uncivilized, he did differentiate between what he regarded as different degrees of backwardness and barbarism. At the bottom of the rung were the Ambonese and Ceramese, whom he thought were both carefree and

59 Ibid., p. 203.
60 Ibid., p. 205.
61 Ibid., p. 206. Emphasis in the original.

violent in nature,[62] while the Malays, on the other hand, were seen by him as an unruly race addicted to their vices:

> All the Malay race [...] have a most inordinate thirst for gambling, and their favourite method of gratifying this passion is cock-fighting. [...] The passion for this vice among the Malays is shown in their language; for there is one specific name for cock-fighting, one for the natural and one for the artificial spur of the cock, two names for the comb, three for crowing, two for a cock-pit and one for a professional cock-fighter.[63]

Bickmore was also disgusted by many of the traditional customs and pastimes of the people, and wrote disapprovingly of the habit of betel-nut chewing, which he found unhygienic and left them with a 'disgusting appearance'.[64] (A view that was shared by Edmund Roberts, who was likewise appalled by the practice while he was in Siam and Cochinchina.) Opium abuse was another native indulgence that offended him greatly, and in his writing he gave a vivid description of the state of the victims, whose bodies had been wasted by the drug.[65] He did, however, note that the trade of opium across the archipelago was something that was regulated by the Dutch authorities – the very same authorities who hosted his travels – and that the colonial government had farmed out the sale and distribution of opium to every district in the colony, selling distribution rights to the highest bidder and earning the government millions of dollars every year as a result.

The Javanese who had been transported from Java to Ambon and Ceram were, to him, 'a most-villainous looking set, and nearly all had been guilty of the bloodiest crimes'.[66] Of the Javanese in general, he wrote that:

> The men have but a few strangling hairs for beards, and these they generally pull out with a pair of iron tweezers. The hair on the head of both sexes

62 Bickmore claimed that the people of Ambon were unable to comprehend the need to plan for the future, and thus lived careless lives. As he put it: 'the great obstacle to every reform among these natives is, that only a very few of them, if they have enough for one day, will earn anything for the morrow. *Carpe Diem* is a motto more absolutely observed here than in luxurious Rome. The desire of all Europeans to have something reserved for sickness or old age is a feeling which these people appear to never experience' (p. 197).

63 Ibid., pp. 61-62.

64 Ibid., pp. 181-182.

65 Ibid., pp. 280-281.

66 Ibid., p. 217.

> is lank, coarse and worn long. Each sex, therefore, resembles the other so closely that nearly every foreigner will, at first, find himself puzzled in many cases to know whether he is looking at a man or a woman. *This want of differentiation in the sexes possibly indicates their low rank in the human family, if the law may be applied here that obtains amongst most other animals*.[67]

That Bickmore regarded the Javanese as a race that occupied a 'low rank in the human family' was neither novel nor unique. John Crawfurd, in his *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) had already divided the ethnic groups of the region into several categories, and introduced his own distinction between the 'higher races' and 'lower races' decades earlier.[68] That he thought that Javanese men and women looked alike and that there was a 'want of differentiation in the sexes' among them also reminds us of the view that some Americans had about Sumatrans, and how that was used as a justification for the killing of Sumatran women during the First Sumatran Expedition we have looked at earlier.

Bickmore's assessment of the Javanese and their culture also echoed that of Thomas Stamford Raffles, who he so obviously held in high regard and referred to again and again. He noted that the Javanese were, in former times, Hindus and Buddhists, and like other Orientalist scholars of the nineteenth century regarded the Hindu-Buddhist era as the highpoint of Javanese culture and civilization. Bickmore however argued that the architectural achievements of the Javanese could not have been the result of their own native genius and labour; and that the glories of the temple complex of Prambanan must have been the result of direct Indian migration to Java, for he argued that:

> These structures were doubtless planned and superintended by natives of India. They were dedicated to Hindu worship, and here the Brahmins and Buddhists appear to have forgotten their bitter hostility, and in some cases even worshiped at the same temple. The Indian origin of these works is further proved by images of the zebu, or humped ox, which have been found here and elsewhere in Java, but it does not now exist, and probably never did, in any part of the archipelago.[69]

67 Ibid., p. 34. Emphasis mine.

68 Crawfurd, *History*. See also Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

69 Bickmore, p. 47. Elsewhere in his work Bickmore continued with the theme of Indian migration to the archipelago, between pages 62 and 64.

Turning to the present, Bickmore emphasized what he saw as the laziness of the Javanese, a theme that was repeated often enough in the writings of other colonial writers like Raffles; and in his *Travels* he pushed the argument one step further by claiming that the temples and monuments of Java could only have been built by the Javanese had they been under the supervision of others. (An argument that he would return to later, as he expressed his approval of Dutch lordship over the Javanese.)

Another thing that Bickmore shared with Raffles was a common disdain for Islam, which he regarded as a foreign religion that had been brought by the Arabs. Though he admitted that he understood little about the Islamic faith of the Javanese he saw and met, he evidently thought little of their rites and rituals, as he recounted after his short visit to a mosque in Semarang:

> Their priests are always Arabs, or their mestizo descendants, the same class of people as those who introduced this faith. Anyone who has been to Mecca is regarded as next to a saint, and many go to Singapore or Penang, where they remain for a year or two, and then return and declare that they have seen the holy city.[70]

Professing neither knowledge nor sympathy for Islam, Bickmore regarded many Muslim practices negatively, and singled out polygamy for particular censure. While condemning what he regarded as the evils of polygamy he quotes extensively from Raffles – and this happens to be the longest quote found in the entire book. Raffles' condemnation of polygamy among the Javanese and Malays was reproduced *in toto* thus:

> Of the causes which have tended to lower the character of the Asiatics in comparison to Europeans, none has a more decided influence than polygamy. To all those noble and generous feelings, all that delicacy of sentiment, that romantic and poetical spirit, which virtuous love inspires in the heart of a European, the Javan is a stranger; and in the communication between the sexes he seeks only convenience and little more than the gratification of an appetite. But the evil does not stop here: education is neglected, and family attachments are weakened. A Javan chief has been known to have sixty acknowledged children, and it too often happens that in such cases sons having been neglected in their

70 Ibid., p. 51.

> infancy become dissipated, idle, and worthless; and spring up like rank grass and overrun the country.[71]

Falling back upon the opinions of other European scholars, Bickmore was likewise convinced of the lowly nature of the Javanese, Malays and other natives he met and saw around him. But just how Bickmore could reconcile his general view of the natives as a people of 'low rank in the human family' after his face-to-face encounter with some notable Javanese figures remains unclear. During his stay in Batavia he met the Javanese-Arab aristocrat and artist Raden Saleh Sjarif Boestaman, and conceded that the Raden was known both in the East Indies and Europe.[72] Raden Saleh enquired about Bickmore's own circumstances and past, and what role he had played during the American Civil War, noting that 'he trusted that it would not be long before all the slaves in our land would be free'.[73]

Bickmore's meeting with Raden Saleh was perhaps the most interesting of all his encounters with the native population of the East Indies, for this was the first time that he met a Javanese of rank. (Who spoke French and German, and who was in fact more famous than him at the time.) That a Javanese nobleman had demonstrated keen awareness of the goings-on in Bickmore's America, and had shown concern for the fate of the African-Americans who were still being discriminated against in that country, did not sway Bickmore from his own 'scientific' conviction that native Southeast Asians were a lowly people. Bickmore's meeting with Raden Saleh was an event that occurred through and after several layers of mediation: The Raden was not an individual whom he could engage with as a personality in his

71 Ibid., p. 279.

72 Raden Saleh was himself of mixed ancestry, and came from a prominent family of Hadrami Arabs based in Semarang. In 1829 he was selected by the Dutch authorities to be sent to the Netherlands to study fine art and painting, where he was tutored by Cornelius Kruseman. During his long stay in Europe he came under the influence of other European painters such as Delacroix and Vernet. After his return to Java he married a member of the royal family of Jogjakarta, and built his opulent mansion in Cikini. By the time Bickmore met the Raden at his residence, much of the grounds around the Raden's mansion had been converted to a public garden (in 1862). Raden Saleh was already well known, and certainly more famous than Albert Bickmore by the time that the two of them met. He had painted numerous landscapes and portraits of notables in the East Indies, including portraits of Herman Willem Daendels, Johannes van den Bosch, Jean Chretien Baud, as well as several self-portraits of himself. Perhaps the most important and famous among his works was *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro* (1857) that was later gifted to King Willem III of Holland, and is widely regarded by contemporary Indonesian art historians as one of the first works of realist art that anticipated the future rise of Indonesian nationalism across the archipelago. See Algadri.

73 Bickmore, pp. 38-39.

own right, but rather as a sample of a native type who was already defined by a myriad of essentialist traits. As Slater has argued, there were rarely any instances of meaningful conversation between East and West then, for the prevailing assumption widely held was that 'the West has nothing to learn from the non-West',[74] and this was made evident in the course of the meeting between the American scientist and the Javanese nobleman. The Raden may have been an exceptional painter, but his was a singular anomalous case; and the Javanese in general were not, in Bickmore's opinion, inclined towards science. Bickmore does not tell the reader if he answered any of the Raden's questions, but focused instead on the furnishings in the nobleman's palace – from the Brussels carpet on the floor to the engravings on the wall to the palace grounds that were, in his opinion, tastefully laid.

As Rattansi and Westwood have noted, the non-Western Other has often only figured as an *object* of knowledge, and rarely as a producer of it.[75] It was this unbridgeable gap that was made clear during the interview between Bickmore and Raden Saleh: Bickmore studied the Javanese nobleman, secretaried his manners and dress, noted the details of his features; but Bickmore could not overcome the radical incommensurability that divided him from the native Other, and did not entertain the possibility that the Raden might have been able to teach him a thing or two about the land of Java that he visited. Yet Raden Saleh had demonstrated knowledge of Bickmore's own country, and the realities of slavery and racism in America that were clearly more important to him than Bickmore's seashells.

Elsewhere in his narrative Bickmore also expressed disbelief and incomprehension at the thought that the native Christians of Ambon could have risen up against their colonial masters, for they were 'members of the same Dutch church'.[76] Bickmore wrote about the native uprisings in Java, notably the Java War of 1825-1830 that was led by Prince Diponegoro, and he noted that the Sultan of Ternate had sent his troops to aid the Dutch in their war against the Javanese, and to suppress the revolt in Ceram.[77] These were instances where native leaders had demonstrated their agency and capabilities in no uncertain terms, for as Carey has shown, the Javanese were able to rise against the Dutch, and on several occasions – particularly during the opening stages of the Java War – had defeated the Dutch colonial army through their use of guerrilla tactics and better knowledge of the lay

74 Slater, pp. 92-93.
75 Rattansi and Westwood, p. 5.
76 Bickmore, p. 184.
77 Ibid., p. 311.

of the land.[78] Yet instances of native rebellion seemed beyond the pale of consideration for Bickmore, and were never presented as instances of native agency at work. Instead, at several points in his narrative Bickmore returned to the theme of native backwardness and the natural 'obstacles' that stood in their way of development.[79] These defects were, for Bickmore, both cultural and biological in nature and specific to the natives of the archipelago; and the only remedy could only come from a force that originated elsewhere, namely the West. The West, however, was no longer confined to the old powers of Western Europe; for there was a new Western power on the rise as well: America.

6.IV Albert Bickmore's adventure in conchology and America's entry into the club of civilized Western nations

> Civilization is a conspiracy. Modern life is the silent compact of comfortable folk to keep up pretences.[80]
> – John Buchan, *The Power-House*

Close to the end of his *Travels*, Bickmore wrote thus:

> The open-hearted and generous manner in which I have been everywhere received and aided, by both the government and by private persons, as has constantly appeared on these pages, convinces me that any American, whose character and mission are above suspicion, will be treated with no greater kindness and consideration by any other nation than by the Dutch in the East Indian Archipelago.[81]

We should not be unduly surprised by Bickmore's effusive compliments to his Dutch hosts, or the fact that he was less inclined to dwell on the less pleasant and more violent aspects of Dutch colonial rule in the East Indies. His contemporary the natural scientist Alfred Russel Wallace – whose work *The Malay Archipelago* was published around the same time as Bickmore's *Travels* – was likewise able to travel around the region with the help of the Dutch, and was also more interested in insects and orangutans than the

78 Carey, *Babad Dipanagara*.
79 Bickmore, pp. 152-153, 197.
80 Buchan, p. 42.
81 Bickmore, pp. 533-534.

condition of the natives who were then living under Western colonial rule.[82] In any case neither Bickmore nor Wallace seemed terribly concerned about what was then being done to the natives of America by the United States government, or the condition of the natives of India, Burma and other parts of Southeast Asia that had come under British rule. The fact was that by the late nineteenth century the conduct of the Dutch in their Southeast Asian colonies was no different from that of the Spanish in the Philippines, the British in India or Burma, the French in Indochina, or the Americans back in the United States. This was the high point of empire, and men like Bickmore were products of the age they lived in. At that time the march of civilization entailed the trampling of native rights and the subjugation of 'inferior' peoples, and Bickmore was certainly not against the march of civilization – on the contrary, he was at its vanguard.

That Bickmore availed himself to the hospitality and help of the Dutch authorities in Java and the rest of the Dutch East Indies is telling of how American-Dutch relations had improved by the 1860s, and how Americans regarded the realities of colonial power in Southeast Asia by then. Motivated by his earnest desire to procure for his own country the best collection of seashells that he could get his hands on, Bickmore was less interested in the realities of socio-political life in the Dutch colony or the plight of the Javanese, Sumatrans, Ambonese and other native communities that had been subjected to colonial rule. That he did not stir up any trouble, or expound the virtues of American republicanism as Walter Gibson had done earlier in Sumatra, must have come as a relief to the Governor-General based in Batavia at least. To what extent Bickmore managed to improve American-Dutch relations after his visit is anyone's guess, but he was indeed as thoughtful and scrupulous as he claimed. His work duly acknowledged the help that he received from the Dutch, and was dedicated to Baron Sloet van de Beele (by then the former Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies[83]), N.A.T. Arriens (former Governor of the Moluccas), J.F.R. van der Bosche (former Governor of West Sumatra), as well as the many Dutch and American officers and merchants whom he met along the way.[84]

Unlike the narratives of Reynolds, Warriner, Taylor or Roberts, Bickmore's *Travels* is neater and more focused in its execution. The narrative begins with his arrival in the East Indies and ends with his departure from Singapore,

82 Ibid., p. 314, footnote *.

83 By the time Bickmore returned to America Governor-General Van de Beele had already been replaced by Governor-General Pieter Meijer.

84 Bickmore, p. ii.

and there are no long accounts of the arduous sea voyage from America to Southeast Asia and back again. (Bickmore clearly adored seashells and marine life, but seemed less interested in boats and sailing.) But like Fitch W. Taylor who remained constantly in the company of the familiar and the known, Bickmore likewise travelled only in the company of Europeans, with whom he was familiar and comfortable. Throughout his stay in Java, Ambon and Sumatra he resided in the many *ruma negri* (state guesthouses) that had been built by the natives to accommodate the Dutch and other Westerners who were their guests,[85] and was often in the company of Dutch officers and troops loyal to them.

The fact that he was deeply grateful to his Dutch hosts did not, however, mean that Bickmore's love for his country was diminished in any way. Though he was careful not to arouse the envy of the Dutch, at no point did his faith in his beloved America wane. And at some points he did speak of America's greatness when in the company of the natives, as he did at the village of Tulahu; if for no other reason than to make it clear to them that the United States was a rising power and was 'the largest and most powerful of all nations':

> Each evening that I was in this village the rajah insisted on my passing hour after hour on his veranda, describing to him the foreign countries he could name. Like many other natives who would like to be free from all European rule, it afforded him great comfort to hear that *Tana Ollanda* [Holland] was much smaller than France or England. When I came to tell him that *Tana America* was a still greater country, he listened politely, but a half-incredulous smile revealed his belief that I only spoke of it in such an enthusiastic manner because I was an American; yet when I added, that however much other nations might wish to possess these beautiful islands, America would never have such a desire, his knowledge of geography seemed complete at once, and he explained to all who were listening that *Tana America* was admitted by all to be the largest and most powerful of nations.[86]

Bickmore's claim that America had no imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia was a claim that had been repeated before by many other Americans, including Walter Gibson, who had landed himself in a spot of trouble with the Dutch. In a few decades that claim would be proven hollow with America's

85 Ibid., p. 172.
86 Ibid., p. 174. Emphasis in the original.

conquest of the Philippines (1898-1902), but for now he was still able to profess American greatness and exceptionalism with a clear conscience. Bickmore the American conchologist plodded along, working away under the shadow of empire. And though scientists are wont to distinguish themselves from pedestrian tourists, they have one thing in common: they both need peace and tranquillity to enjoy what they do.

Focused as he was on his prized shells, Bickmore spent less time worrying about the conflicts that were taking place across the Dutch territories and was not bothered by the methods that were used to extend and impose Dutch rule in the places he visited. In Ambon he chanced upon a deserted village where there was no one save the chief and his immediate family. Bickmore noted that the rest of the villagers had migrated to other nearby villages as they did not like the chief that had been appointed by the Dutch, but he had no issue whatsoever with the mode of Dutch indirect rule and flatly stated that 'the Dutch government claims the right to appoint each native prince' to do their bidding on their behalf.[87] Though Bickmore would probably have never tolerated the idea of a foreign power interfering and directing domestic American affairs, the Ambonese were not Americans, and in his opinion not civilized, either.

Bickmore seemed selectively blind to the realities of colonial rule in the Dutch East Indies. He did note that centuries earlier the Spice Islands had been won by the Dutch from the Portuguese after a war of extermination where the native population was virtually wiped out, but did not seem to note the continuities of violence and bloodshed that were still going on during his visit there.[88] On several of his excursions he accompanied Dutch officers who were leading punitive missions, and observed that the Dutch were more than capable of using violence whenever they deemed it necessary; and this was patently obvious during another encounter that takes place later in his narrative. While off the coast of Ceram he followed the Dutch Resident who was on a mission to apprehend some natives who had organized an 'illegal gathering', allegedly for the sake of plotting a rebellion against their colonial rulers.[89]

During this Dutch-led punitive mission Bickmore noted that the Dutch force consisted of local native troops who later indulged in one of their 'bloody carousals', after drinking alcohol made of palm and then 'kicking about a human head which has been obtained for this special occasion,

87 Ibid., p. 149.
88 Ibid., p. 217.
89 Ibid., pp. 207-209.

tossed into the midst of these human fiends all besmeared with its own clotted blood'.[90] Though he confessed to be sickened by the sight of the spectacle, Bickmore evidently failed to connect the dots: The fact was that these 'human fiends' were fiends in the pay of the Dutch government, and their behaviour was no different from the natives whom they were commanded to apprehend. Bickmore witnessed the savagery of the Dutch native troops, but could only see it as native savagery in action, rather than colonial savagery in practice. But it was with such bloody tools that colonial power was maintained in the East Indies, though the irony seemed lost on the scientist from Maine. And like the Dutch whose company he kept, Bickmore could not conceive of the possibility that the natives of the Dutch East Indies would one day use the very same tools of colonial governmentality – the schools, the companies, the newspapers – against itself; and had no inkling of the future rise of Indonesian nationalism that lay just a few decades ahead.[91]

Bickmore's wilful blindness to the contradictions of colonial rule recur again and again in the text, and as we have seen earlier he was likewise unable to see the connection between the disastrous effects of opium abuse among the natives and the fact that opium farming was part of Dutch colonial policy, earning the government of the East Indies an income of 'four or five million dollars a year'.[92] To borrow the phrase of Sherlock Holmes, *he looked, but he did not see* – or chose not to see. Rather, Bickmore was selective in his praise, and he strongly approved of Dutch enterprise and industry, and 'the determination of the Dutch to make for themselves whatever they need, and to be independent of foreign markets'.[93] The fact that Dutch enterprise in the East Indies involved the mass labour of the Javanese and other natives of the archipelago did not trouble Bickmore in the least, for he insisted that 'there may yet be a bright future for this people', as long as they lived under the rule and supervision of their Western colonial masters.[94] That he could think along those lines was hardly surprising, considering that back home in America prominent physicians and doctors like Josiah Nott had been arguing for decades that black American slaves were best served by slavery, and that as slaves they would attain their fullest physical potential.[95] Bickmore seemed to concur with the view that the natives of

90 Ibid., pp. 209-210.
91 See Ricklefs; Steinberg.
92 Bickmore, pp. 279-280.
93 Ibid., p. 58.
94 Ibid., p. 59.
95 See Horsman.

the East Indies could and would be transformed into disciplined labourers under Dutch tutelage and guidance, regardless of whatever violent means were used to compel them into servitude.

During his visit to the shipyard of Surabaya, Bickmore was impressed by the sight of the warship *Medusa*, which led the combined Dutch, French, British and American force in the attack against the Japanese during the Shimonoseki Campaign of 1863-1864. Though seashells were his forte, Bickmore did speak highly of the military capabilities of the Dutch colonial navy, and noted that 'the many scars [on the hull of the *Medusa*] showed the dangerous part she had taken in the attack, and I have frequently heard the Dutch officers speak with a just pride of the bravery and skill of her officers in that engagement'.[96] That he could share the pride of the Dutch Navy and speak so well of their naval capabilities then suggests that American exceptionalism was not as strong an idea as it had been at the start of the nineteenth century – at least for Bickmore.

America had, by then, developed to become a country rather different from what some of its founding fathers had envisioned it to be. America's isolationism and its profession of neutrality had given way to a growing America that had extended its borders from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and was growing still. On 30 March 1867, the Alaska Purchase was signed between the governments of the United States and Russia, and Alaska was sold to America for the sum of 7.2 million dollars. As a result of this purchase, America had once again grown in size – this time by 600,000 square miles – but the yearning to expand was not so easily sated.

It was to this ever-growing America that Albert Smith Bickmore returned. Upon his return to the United States he continued his research and writing. Professor Bickmore had made it, and made it big, mingling with the rich and powerful during New York's gilded age. The museum he longed for was eventually approved in April 1869, and he would be credited as one of its founders. Its foundations were laid in June 1874 by none other than President Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877), who would also undertake a world tour and visit Southeast Asia later. With a collection that would eventually comprise of more than 30,000,000 samples of animal and plant life, it would become the ontological mapping centre of the world, capturing the natural world 'as it should be'.[97] Luke has highlighted the close relationship between politics and power that went into the planning of the museum, and how 'museums function as vitally important modelling agencies and mapping centres that

96 Bickmore, p. 58.

97 Luke, pp. 100-101.

meld ontological meanings with cultural terrains'.[98] Bickmore undoubtedly realized the pedagogic and ideological power that such a museum would possess: His insistence that the Museum of Natural History be built in New York was largely due to his belief that the museum ought to be located at the very heart of American economic power and political influence, as opposed to the Museum of Comparative Zoology – that was set up by his mentor and teacher Louis Agassiz in Cambridge.[99]

The manuscript of Bickmore's *Travels* was completed in 1868, and first published in London by John Murray of Albemarle Street, and in 1869 by D. Appleton and Company of New York. That work would cement his standing as a man of science, and years later W.H. Davenport Adams would write in the preface of his book *The Eastern Archipelago* (1880) that he was 'largely indebted to the labours of Wallace and Bickmore', placing Bickmore on par with Wallace himself.[100] Bickmore's success was for both his country and himself. America gained a natural history museum – 'the most well-known and highly regarded museum in the United States'[101] – and he would be elevated among the great and eminent men of Western science, proving that America and Americans could match any of the achievements of Western Europe.

Bickmore passed away at a ripe old age in 1914, long after America had become a power in the Pacific with a colony of its own in Southeast Asia. The work he wrote gives us a detailed, though uncritical, look at how Western colonial power was exercised in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. That Bickmore did not object to the form of racialized colonial-capitalism that was at work in Southeast Asia at the time hardly comes as a surprise when we consider his own educational and cultural background, and how he belonged to a particular group of nineteenth-century scientists who subscribed to the notion of 'natural' racial difference and racial hierarchies. Racial scientists like Samuel Adolphus Cartwright (1793-1863) had come up with a host of outlandish fabricated maladies that were said to affect black American slaves in particular, from *Dysaesthesia Aethiopica*, 'a disease particular to negroes', to *Drapetomania* – the 'unnatural desire' of blacks wanting to escape the condition of slavery which Cartwright argued was the 'natural condition' of inferior races.[102] While in the 1840s eminent physicians like James Marion Sims (1813-1883) were performing medical experiments

98 Ibid., pp. 100-123.
99 Ibid., pp. 104-105.
100 Adams, *The Eastern Archipelago*, p. vi.
101 Luke, p. 100.
102 See Cartwright.

on female slaves in Alabama (but was nevertheless praised for his work and later celebrated as the father of modern gynaecology).[103]

Bickmore's view of the 'savage races' of the East Indies would outlive him and be taken up with gusto by future Western scientists and colonial administrators, who later applied to his observations other modes of typology and classification; dividing the peoples of Southeast Asia according to their height, colour of their skin and size and shape of their skulls. All of this would culminate in works such as D.J.H. Nyessen's *The Races of Java* (1929), where scientific racism reached its zenith.[104] Yet it has to be remembered that scientific racism was then a respectable field of study, undertaken by respectable men decked out in well-tailored suits, with clean fingernails and well-groomed hair. The path that these scientific racists walked upon was cleared by racialized colonial-capitalism – the midwife to colonial knowledge-production. And scientists like Bickmore did not object to the processes of othering and the building of racial hierarchy that he saw in the Dutch East Indies any more than they felt the need to protest against the law of gravity.

Americans would continue with their adventures in Asia, and in 1871 the United States attacked Korea for the first time.[105] From the Shimonoseki campaign in 1863 to the attack on Ganghwa Island in 1871, America had grown in both ambition and prowess, closing the gap between itself and the West European powers, while extending the gap between itself and the polities of Southeast Asia. As Herring has argued, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards America's development went through a transitional stage between the post-Napoleonic global system and the international order that would prevail up to the First World War. With a shaky peace secured in Europe, the Western powers were able to exploit the firepower gap between the West and the rest of the world; and in this common Western venture America tagged along as a 'hitchhiking imperialist power', profiting from

103 See Gray.

104 See Nyessen.

105 America's first gunboat action in Korea took place in 1871. Earlier in 1866, the American commercial steamer SS *General Sherman* had attempted to reach Pyongyang carrying its cargo of cotton and tin, but was attacked by the Koreans who apparently had little interest in the vessel's wares. In 1871, a diplomatic mission was sent to establish formal relations, and to enquire about the fate of the lost American ship. The American ships were attacked by the Koreans on 1 June 1871, around the waters of Ganghwa Island. By the end of the battle on 10 June – which lasted no longer than an hour – the Koreans lost more than 40 guns, while five of their forts and four of their shore batteries were destroyed. It would take several more attempts for the Americans to gain a foothold in Korea, and the final result was the Shufeldt Treaty of 1882 between the United States and the Korean government. See Chang.

the gains made by the European states in the Far East.[106] But American expansionism during this period was 'neither providential nor innocent' as Herring has pointed out, and it often 'showed scant regard for "inferior" peoples who stood in the way'.[107]

106 Herring, p. 220.
107 Ibid., p. 184.

7 Empire at last

America's arrival as a colonial power in Southeast Asia

> Perceived through the lens of America's ideology, empire and liberty are mutually reinforcing.[1]
> – Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty*

7.I Travelling in the shade of empire: American tourists and amateurs in Southeast Asia

With colonialism came pacification, and at the end of the nineteenth century much of Southeast Asia was under the control of the Western European powers. Burma, Malaya and the Straits Settlements were under British rule, Indochina under the French, the East Indies under the Dutch and the Philippines under the Spanish. With the exception of Siam and a few pockets of local native power, almost all of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia had been colonized and the economies of the region had been geared towards 'productive labour': producing raw materials such as tin, rubber, tobacco, coffee and spices that would be exported to their imperial mother country, to be processed and manufactured into goods that were later sold back to the natives in the colonial market. After a century of wars on land and gunboat actions at sea, Southeast Asia had been rendered safe for regulated and policed movement under the auspices of colonial government. The fluid movement and migration of peoples across the region slowly came to a halt thanks to the regime of the passport, identity card and travel papers; and in time the introduction of the colonial racial censuses would compartmentalise the complex societies of Southeast Asia into neat, exclusive categories based on racial difference.

By the end of the nineteenth century there would be a growing number of Americans who wanted to see Southeast Asia too. Some of them were reckless bravos and filibusters cast in the same mould as Walter Gibson, such as Charles Lee Moses, who got himself into trouble almost as soon as he landed in Brunei in 1865, and whose short-lived settlement 'Ellena' (1865-1866) was arguably America's first commercial colony in Southeast

1 Immerman, p. 5.

Asia.[2] After Moses' ill-fated misadventure, the American government would not send another Consul to Brunei for more than a century.[3] Following in the footsteps of more serious explorers like Albert Bickmore came other American travellers, some of whom were well-heeled amateurs driven by their curiosity and cushioned by their financial security, able to travel and see the world in comfort.

Among the better known of these American amateurs was Frank Vincent, whose work *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and Scenes of South-Eastern Asia* was published in New York in 1874.[4] Unlike the earlier generation of American travellers to Southeast Asia who had to put up with crammed cabins and shared toilets, Vincent was able to afford the luxury of first-class travel – complete with oysters, roast beef and potatoes, wine and cigars.[5] He was equally lavish in his gifts, and presented the King of Cambodia a gold-mounted American revolver.[6] (Vincent's father was also named Frank Vincent. He had come to New York to set up one of the oldest firms there – Vincent, Clark and Co. – that dealt with Asia and was in the silk trade.[7]) His two-year journey (between 1871 to 1872) took him across British India and mainland Southeast Asia, where he visited British Burma, independent Siam and French Indochina.

2 Charles Lee Moses had served in the Northern Union Army during the American Civil War like Albert Bickmore, but his journey to Borneo was motivated by his desire for glory and profit like Walter Gibson. Moses arrived in Brunei in July 1865, and managed to secure a plot of land called Bukit Merikan (American Hill) from Sultan Abdul Mumin; a move that alarmed the British immediately. Although he had been given the job of Consul by Secretary of State William Seward, Moses was given no salary, and thus was left to his own devices. Together with another American adventurer Joseph William Torrey he formed the American Trading Company of Borneo, and after recruiting labourers from China they created their own settlement called Ellena, with their own flag. William Torey declared himself the 'Raja of Ambong and Murudu', fashioning himself after the British adventurer James Brooke. The colony was a failure, and it was attacked by native and Chinese bandits and pirates. In 1867 Moses threatened the Sultan of Brunei for allegedly not doing anything to help protect the Americans there. Later in September 1867 Moses was suspended from his duties by the American government. Moses' venture had been a failure and he relocated to Singapore after having lost everything. He died in 1868 on his return journey to the United States. Torrey was luckier as he managed to sell his shares of the American Trading Company to the Austrian merchant-adventurer Baron von Oberbeck in 1881, after which the British North Borneo Company was formed. This brought to an end America's attempts to gain a foothold on the island of Borneo. See Tregonning; Keith; and Tatu.

3 See Tregonning; Keith; and Tatu.

4 See Vincent.

5 Ibid., pp. 191, 193.

6 Ibid., p. 279.

7 'Death of Frank Vincent, Death of an Old New-York Merchant', *New York Times*, 8 September 1889.

Vincent's work was interesting in several respects. He was among the first to use the term 'South-Eastern Asia', and his observations of life in British Burma, Siam and French Cochinchina were candid and frank – though like Bickmore, who was courteous to his Dutch hosts, he was careful not to tread on the political sensitivities of the British colonial authorities in any way. (Though the British press were less impressed by Vincent's travel writing – *The Spectator* magazine wryly dismissed his work on India as 'hurried' and 'disappointing'.[8]) By that time there were more Americans venturing to Asia, and the annual catalogue of the New York publishers Harper and Brothers of 1874 listed scores of new titles, from Vincent's *Land of the White Elephant* to Alcock's *Japan* to Doolittle's *China*.[9]

That Frank Vincent was keen and able to see Southeast Asia was a reflection of the changed geopolitical realities of the time and the growing divide between East and West. While more and more Europeans and Americans were able to travel to Asia in relative comfort and security, it was also increasingly difficult for Asians to cross the Pacific and find their way to America. As I have argued elsewhere, these Western travellers were conscious of the fact that they were travelling safely across the imperial domains of their respective countries, and were thankful for the benefits of empire themselves.[10] Isabella Bird's *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883) is an example of such a work. Her account of her travels across the Malay states in the Malay Peninsula paid ample lip service to the great benefits of imperialism, and she was aware of the fact that she was able to make the journey in relative safety thanks to the protection she was given by the colonial forces of the British Army.[11] Bird's depiction of the Malays of the peninsula was generally dismissive and patronizing, describing native children as 'ape-like' and leading her to the conclusion that the natives of Southeast Asia would eventually die out in the face of Western progress and development. Here Bird established a link between Southeast Asia and America, for her belief that the natives of Southeast Asia could not compete with Western modernity was framed by her observations of the Native Americans in America, which she had visited earlier. Bird was persuaded

8 On 24 June 1876, *The Spectator* magazine featured a review of Frank Vincent's work *Through and Through the Tropics*: 'More than half the volume is devoted to India. Mr. Vincent is an entertaining writer, and his experiences of travel, if not exactly novel, are always readable. But there is little beyond the superficial in them. The chapters on India are, from this point of view, especially disappointing' (*The Spectator*, 24 June 1876, p. 20).

9 Vincent, pp. 1-5.

10 Noor, 'Innocents Abroad?'; Noor, 'Commemorer les femmes'.

11 Bird, pp. 210, 338-339.

by the popular theory of 'native auto-genocide' that was in currency at the time, and which was also used to explain how and why the native peoples of North America were dying out as they were being forcibly relocated to native reservations in the United States.[12]

Another British author who was popular in the United States then was Anna Harriette Leonowens, whose *English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and *Siamese Harem Life* (1873) were published in Boston.[13] Purporting to offer a rare 'insider's view' of the court of Siam, Leonowens' works were riddled with inaccuracies and distortions, and offered instead a kaleidoscope of Orientalist tropes – including a harem populated by scantily-clad Siamese damsels who seemed to have nothing better to do than dance all day long before their king.[14] Both Bird and Leonowens emphasized the Otherness of the natives of Southeast Asia, and their belief that East and West shall never – and should never – meet. (Bird found it distasteful that some of the Malay nobles she met had adopted Western dress, furniture and manners, which she felt was unnatural.[15]) In their writings we can see the workings of the parallel logic of 'the white woman's burden'. But by this late stage of the nineteenth century Southeast Asia had already been written about, studied and mapped in detail, and there already existed a vast repertoire of stock clichés and stereotypes of the exotic East to draw from.

Like many Europeans who had travelled to Southeast Asia before him, Frank Vincent was impressed by British imperialism in particular, and noted that the 'paying (i.e. profit-making) colonies' of Britain in the Far East (India, Burma and the Straits Settlements) were 'healthy and growing'. Conversely, he had a low opinion of France's Eastern Empire and concluded that 'France in the East is, as far as my limited observation goes, a great farce – a travesty, a burlesque upon colonisation in general'.[16] That the French colonies in Cochinchina and Cambodia were so poorly managed (in his view) were, for Vincent, a reflection of the French character, or lack of it:

> The French character is sadly wanting in many of the virtues necessary for successful pioneering of foreign lands; it lacks that sturdy, energetic, persevering trait which we see so ably displayed by the English in India and Australia and by the German settlers in America.[17]

12 Brantlinger, pp. 43-56.
13 Leonowens, *The English Governess*; Leonowens, *Siamese Harem Life*.
14 Noor, 'Innocents Abroad?', p. 74, image 1.
15 Bird, p. 338.
16 Vincent, p. 312.
17 Ibid., p. 312.

Even worse than the French were the native rulers of Southeast Asia, who, in Vincent's account come across as idle and clueless at best, and tyrannical at worst. He singled out the ruler of Ava (Burma) in particular, whose 'tyranny was most felt in the immediate vicinity of the capital' and whose government was 'rotten to the very core', and where 'bribery was rampant'.[18] (At this stage of Burma's history it had already been defeated twice by the British after the First and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars, but the last ruler of Burma, King Thibaw, would only be deposed after the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885.) Vincent's disparaging remarks about the ruler of Burma in many ways recall the negative comments of British authors before him, such as Snodgrass and Crawfurd, whom we have looked at elsewhere.[19] But the lack of originality in Vincent's work was hardly surprising, for by the time he was in Southeast Asia the region had already been written about at length by many other Western authors, and the stereotype of the despotic Asiatic tyrant had already become part of the narrative.

Though Vincent had never in his life built a canoe or killed a python (the latter of which Bickmore did, by the way), his exhortation to unleash the 'American pioneering spirit' was in many ways a reflection of the new America on the rise. In the same year that Vincent's work was published, the kingdom of Hawaii formally granted exclusive trading rights to the United States (on 18 March 1874). America's presence in the Pacific was growing, while back home Native Americans of the Comanche, Cheyenne and Kiowa nations were forcibly moved out of their ancestral homelands in Texas to new reservations in Oklahoma; and white supremacists of the Crescent City White League rose against the government of Louisiana in New Orleans in protest against attempts at post-Civil War reconstruction. In 1875, Republican Representative Horace Francis Page introduced the Page Act of 1875, which specifically aimed to stop 'cheap Chinese labour' and 'immoral Chinese women' entering the United States, and by extension perpetuated the stereotype of the exotic and licentious Asian woman that had been a constant trope of Orientalist fiction. (This was later followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was passed by Congress in May 1882.[20]) Americans like Frank Vincent wanted to learn more about Asia, but at the

18 Ibid., pp. 59-60, 62-64.

19 See Noor, *Discursive Construction*, for a discussion of Snodgrass, *Narrative* [...] *Burmese War* and Crawfurd, *Journal* [...] *to the Court of Ava*. pp. 163-166, 167-185.

20 Later Canada passed its own Chinese Immigration Act in 1885, with the explicit intention of limiting the number of Chinese migrating to the country – by placing a 50-dollar 'head tax' on any Chinese person who tried to enter the territory.

same time white Americans did not want the 'yellow races' to come live amongst them.

In 1878-1879 Southeast Asia was visited by the most prominent American traveller of all: former President General Hiram Ulysses Grant (1869-1877), hero of the American Civil War. After he stepped down from high office Grant decided to embark on a world tour that lasted three years, which was documented in detail by John Russell Young.[21] Grant travelled around the world at a time when America's confidence was at its height, and when he and some of his fellow Americans felt that their nation had become a world leader in many fields.[22] (Though the great American railroad strike had taken place in 1877, unemployment had risen and the country's economy was still weak following the long depression.) This was a grand tour like no other, complete with gala dinners, marching bands and gun salutes; and which made Frank Vincent's luxurious jaunt across the East Indies look like a low-budget backpacker's tour – though Young bemoaned the fact that in the tropics there was 'a scant supply of ice'.[23]

Grant began his tour in Europe and visited India and Southeast Asia as he made his way to the East, before stopping in China and Japan on the way back home. While in India Grant felt that Britain's colonial policy in Asia was 'hard, reactionary and selfish',[24] though he was unable to come up with some solution to the 'Chinese problem' that had become an issue back in California. In British Burma he noted that Burmese Buddhism was free of the caste system that he saw in India, and that there was 'no priestly class, claiming grotesque, selfish and extraordinary privileges'.[25] He opined that Burma would be a good trading partner for the United States – as America could produce the same goods that Britain sold there, and at better prices – but regretted the fact that Britain evidently wanted to monopolize the Burmese market for itself.[26] (This yearning had been shared by the American envoy Edmund Roberts decades earlier.) Though Grant was not received by the British authorities in Singapore with a guard of honour and a salute,

21 Young, *Around the World*.

22 In his 'State of the Union Address' that was delivered on 5 December 1876, President Grant stated that 'the international exhibition held in Philadelphia this year, in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of American independence, has proven a great success, and will, no doubt, be of enduring advantage to the country. It has shown the great progress in the arts, sciences, and mechanical skill made in a single century, and demonstrated that we are but little behind older nations in any one branch, while in some we scarcely have a rival.'

23 Young, *Around the World*, vol. 2, p. 190.

24 Ibid., vol.2, p. 159.

25 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 174-175.

26 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 181-182, 183.

Young noted that their stay in Singapore was pleasant enough, 'consisting of dinners and receptions' held in Grant's honour.[27]

While in French Indochina Grant noted that the streets of Saigon were laid out in a French manner and the streets had 'a touch of Paris'.[28] In Siam, Grant was invited by the ruler King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) and met with Prince Bhanurangsi Swanguongse.[29] Later the American general paid a visit to Maharaja (later Sultan) Abu Bakar (r. 1862-1895) of the independent Malay kingdom of Johor, and was impressed by the progress that he saw in the kingdom, initiated by an independent Malay ruler and his native government. Johor had full control of its own immigration policy, and had invited Chinese labour and capital from China to boost its economy; and the Maharaja would later have his own representatives stationed in London. But Young noted that the British were not far away in neighbouring Singapore, and that the British had proclaimed 'their own sort of Monroe doctrine for Asia' where they felt that they had the right to intervene and guide the development of Asiatic states close to their own colonial possessions.[30]

Despite Grant's liberal disposition towards the independent Asian rulers he encountered (like King Chulalongkorn of Siam and Maharaja Abu Bakar of Johor), John Russell Young's narrative was still disposed towards the classification of native types. His depiction of the Indian servants who attended Grant and his company seemed to have been derived from some Orientalist textbook: Indians, he felt, 'were not capable of taking in two ideas at once' and 'the Hindoo's idea of happiness is to be able to sit on his haunches, and chatter or meditate'.[31] When describing the Malays of the archipelago he identified three kinds: the former pirates who had become fishermen, the 'savage Malays' of the jungle and the 'civilized Malays' of the cities.[32] Notwithstanding this typology, Young was convinced that the Malay race as a whole 'was an inferior one' and their 'fate will most likely be the same as our own [Native American] Indian'.[33] Though Grant and his entourage were far away from home, the cultural and historical baggage of their country was always in attendance.

After chasing its manifest destiny for almost a century the United States of America was on the verge of becoming an Asia-Pacific power. For decades

27 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 196-197.
28 Ibid., vol.2, p. 285.
29 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 218-234, 240-249.
30 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 198-199.
31 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 630.
32 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 202-203.
33 Ibid., vol.2, pp. 205-206.

it had sat by and groaked at the corner, as the European powers grew in size, carving up huge chunks of Africa and Asia for their respective empires and growing richer by the day. America was a trading nation and the principle of free trade was still a cornerstone of American diplomacy, but America lacked territories in Asia where American trade could be conducted freely and Americans could feel themselves at home and safe. The relative weakness of the American Navy had been addressed by then. Though America lacked heavy battleships that could match the navies of Europe, during the presidencies of Chester A. Arthur (1881-1885) and Grover Cleveland (1885-1889, 1893-1897) the American Navy had been modernized and developed: Armoured steamers, second-class battleships and armoured cruisers were added to the navy. The ideas of the American strategist and former naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) had by then taken root, and the American government was fully convinced of the need for a powerful navy to project American power abroad.[34] With the exception of Japan (which had begun its own modernization process with the post-1867 Meiji reform), none of the native powers of Southeast and East Asia could match American firepower at sea, and the 'firepower gap' that Herring wrote about was then a reality.[35] In the final years of the nineteenth century America would acquire the Philippines and finally become a colonial power in Southeast Asia, changing its role and identity in the process.

7.II That other Great Game to the East: America's rise as a colonial power from 1898

> The American flag has not been planted on foreign soil to acquire more territory, but for humanity's sake.[36]
> – Slogan on the Republican Party campaign poster of 1900

Southeast Asia has never been a stranger to migrations and conquests, and as Blench has noted the region was always 'a palimpsest upon which

34 Mahan's works that argued for a strong naval force were later translated into several languages, including French, German and Japanese; and prompted countries like Germany and Japan to also develop their naval capabilities. See Mahan.

35 Herring, p. 184.

36 The slogan was based on a quote from a speech by President William McKinley delivered on 12 July 1900 and the poster was printed by the Allied Printing Press of Chicago. Secunda and Moran, p. 20.

a whole range of mobile populations imprinted and then partly erased their legacy over time'.[37] From prehistoric times all the way to the colonial era of the nineteenth century, Southeast Asia was always open to the influence of other external powers, though it was the region's contact with the West that invariably dragged it into the wider conflicts that were fought all over the globe. From the earliest conflicts between the Spanish, Portuguese and the Dutch in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, to Britain's attack and brief occupation of Spanish Manila (1762-1764) during the Seven Years' War – which led to the English commander-merchant Dawsonne Drake being appointed as the Governor of Manila between 1762-1764 – to Lord Minto's invasion of Dutch-held Java in August 1811 during the Napoleonic Wars, all the way to Southeast Asia's support for the respective Western nations during the First and Second World Wars, the nations of Southeast Asia have often been affected by wars that they did not initiate, and forced to take sides in quarrels that were not their own. America's arrival in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century did not shield the region from these larger contestations for power, but only complicated matters further by bringing into the fray another contender for Western hegemony.

Much has been written about the 'Great Game' that was played between the Western powers – notably Britain and Russia[38] – in Central Asia in the nineteenth century, but there were in fact several games that were being played out across Asia and Africa at the time. There was another 'Great Game' that was being played out in the East, and in that game it was the sun of America that was rising, as America transformed itself – by default and intention – from a colony to a colonial power. As Lears has noted, 'by the 1880s, Americans had created a continental settlers' empire. The next move was toward an overseas empire.'[39]

The Great Game in the East was set in a theatre that extended from Southeast Asia to China, and by the time that the United States joined the race the other European powers were already way ahead, collecting new colonies as they went along. Britain had, by then, extended its power across much of India and Burma, and after the Third Anglo-Burmese War had

37 Blench, p. 144.

38 In 1878 Britain invaded Afghanistan again, sparking off the Second Anglo-Afghan War of 1878-1880. Britain's second foray into Afghanistan proved more successful than the first: by the end of the conflict Britain had secured its interests through the Treaty of Gandamak, and was able to ensure that Afghanistan would serve as a buffer against further Russian expansion into Central Asia and the rest of Asia by extension.

39 See Lears.

deposed the ruler of Burma and began turning the kingdom into a colony of its own. Dutch power extended over much of present-day Indonesia, and the Sino-French War of 1884-1885 gave a clear indication of how contested Southeast Asia was by then. France eventually managed to gain control of Tonkin and in 1887 brought Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina and Cambodia together as French Indochina. France's concern about a potential threat from China drove it closer to an alliance with Japan, but Japan also had ambitions of its own and was already beginning to engage with Indochinese elites and activists, with the hope of turning them against the French in due course.[40] Against this backdrop of contesting dreams of empire, the United States was one actor amongst many.

America's lasting entry into Southeast Asia was the result of the 1898 Spanish-American War. The catalyst to the conflict was the revolt against Spanish rule that took place in Cuba in 1895. Led by the revolutionary José Martí, Cuban revolutionaries rallied their forces from Costa Rica, Santo Domingo and Florida to attack Cuba on three fronts. Though America initially did not support the revolution, American public opinion was hostile to Spain – and American companies that relied upon safe passage to Cuban waters were incensed by the prolonged conflict and the cost it incurred on American commerce.[41] Republican President William McKinley (1897-1901) opted for a negotiated peace between Spain and the rebels, but the Democrats in opposition supported the call for war, presenting Spain as an imperial aggressor pursuing a policy of extermination.[42] The American warship USS *Maine* was sent to Havana to protect American citizens there, but an explosion that led to its sinking (on 15 February 1898) was blamed on the Spanish. Maintaining that America did not have an ulterior motive to annex Cuba for itself, the US government issued an ultimatum to the Spanish government that led to both countries declaring war against each other by 21 August 1898. Atwood has argued that the war was ignited by 'outright lies and trumped up accusations', made worse by American journalists and politicians who fanned anti-Spanish sentiment among the general public back home[43] – long before the term 'fake news' became fashionable as it is today. But the war against Spain spread all the way across the Pacific, and led to the fall of Spain's Southeast Asian colony, the Philippines.

40 See Chere.
41 See Pletcher.
42 See Dobson.
43 Atwood, p. 98.

In that same year (1898) America was also actively pursuing its commercial ventures in China and the Pacific: American companies had been given the opportunity to build the new Szechuan-Hankow (Sichuan-Hankou) railway line in China and the Kingdom of Hawaii would later be annexed by the US government on 7 July. The United States was present in Southeast Asia in the form of the Asiatic Squadron under the command of Admiral George Dewey. Eager to press home the attack against the Spanish defenders, the Americans initially worked with the Filipinos to oppose them. Emilio Aguinaldo, the exiled Filipino leader, had returned to the Philippines after the defeat of the Spanish Navy at the Battle of Manila Bay on 1 May 1898. Aguinaldo then issued the Philippine Declaration of Independence on 12 June 1898, and declared that the Philippines was the first independent republic in Southeast Asia. The Malolos Constitution that was proclaimed by the Philippine Congress in January 1899 outlined the framework of Philippine republicanism, with Aguinaldo as the republic's first president and the city of Malolos as the capital of the new state. The Philippine Revolutionary Army was also renamed the Philippine Republican Army.

Following Spain's defeat the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 10 December 1898 led to Spain losing many of her colonial possessions for good, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Spain sold the Philippines to America for a sum of 20,000,000 dollars, and as a result America gained control of its first colony in Southeast Asia. The purchase of the Philippines immediately led to the Philippine-American War, for it brought to an end the First Philippine Republic.[44]

The American purchase effectively rendered the new Philippine constitution meaningless, and hostilities broke out between American and Filipino troops. Filipino nationalists lost faith in America, for as the Filipino nationalist José Rizal pointed out: 'America is the land *par excellence* for freedom, but only for the whites.'[45] The Philippine republic did not have enough time to seek recognition from abroad, and was not able to reorganize the economy of the country before war with the Americans broke out. Unlike the case of Haiti – which was able to court American support and trade relations after it declared itself independent on 1 January 1804 – the Philippines was isolated, and America already had a naval and military presence in its territory. Once again, it was America's superior naval capabilities that prevailed. Centres of Filipino resistance were bombed by American warships, such as the city of Iloilo, which was bombarded by the USS *Baltimore* and USS *Petrel*. The

44 See Cosmas.

45 Quoted in Wolff, p. 293.

Filipino forces resorted to the use of guerrilla tactics, but the capture of its leaders – Emilio Aguinaldo and later Miguel Malvar – left them leaderless. By 1901 the Americans were on the way to winning the war, and in July 1902 the American government (under President Theodore Roosevelt) passed the Philippine Organic Act, bringing the Philippines under American control.[46] The American Asiatic Squadron, which had been active in Asia for so long without a base to call its own and without the means to resupply, was finally able to secure a port facility with supplies of coal and ammunition.[47]

America's conquest of the Philippines has to be seen as part of a greater scramble for power and influence that was taking place across Asia at the time. As Lears has noted, 'what began as a war of liberation ended as an imperial land grab'.[48] But by the closing decade of the nineteenth century America was not the only rising power in Asia. Japan was also a new player in Asian affairs, and was able to project its power far beyond its shores. Japanese agents were sent to Siam and Indochina to gauge the sentiment of Southeast Asians there, and to foster support for Japan's effort to expand its sphere of influence. Japanese authors and artists had begun to travel abroad as well, bringing back news of foreign lands to the Japanese people. In 1897 the Japanese illustrator Takejiro Hasegawa illustrated Charles and Susan M. Bowles' work on Egypt, *A Nile Voyage of Recovery*, presenting Egypt to Japanese readers seen through a Japanese perspective for the first time.[49] But it was China that would receive the brunt of Japan's assault during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, which led to further loss of prestige for the Manchu Qing dynasty as well as growing Japanese influence over Korea and the invasion of Taiwan.[50]

Following the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905, America's Secretary of War – and future President – William Howard Taft came to an agreement with the government of Japan which led to the unstated division of the Asia-Pacific region between the two rising powers: Japan was free to intervene in Korea, while America would be free to govern the Philippines.[51] Thus, America's invasion and subsequent

46 See Agoncillo; Boot.

47 See Schoonover.

48 Lears also noted that within 'fifty-five days, the United States gained control over five island territories with over eleven million inhabitants, including the Philippine and Hawaiian archipelagoes as well as Guam, Cuba, and Puerto Rico'. See: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/02/23/how-the-us-began-its-empire/.

49 See Bowles and Bowles.

50 See Paine.

51 Minger, pp. 279-294.

colonization of the Philippines was one instance of countries changing hands and the region's power balance being disturbed; and by the 1900s Southeast Asia – along with East Asia and the rest of the Pacific – would once again be a region contested by emerging powers.

By the time that America gained control of the Philippines, the Americans' sense of mission and purpose had become clearer. As America developed, so did its perception of itself and its foreign policy, leading to the changes that 'reflected an image of America not only as the Promised Land, but also as a Crusader State called to save the world'.[52] America was well on its way to building its *empire of wealth*,[53] and after a century of dabbling in Southeast Asian affairs – sometimes successfully, sometimes not – America's view of the region and its people was one that was couched in terms of an American Orientalism that saw America as the liberator, saviour and civilizer; and the Southeast Asian Other as the one who was in need of being saved and civilized.[54] American leaders like Senator Albert Beveridge called for the occupation of the Philippines, for the Filipinos – dubbed America's 'little brown brothers' – were deemed incapable of self-government, and it was America's duty to remain there and help the natives along, for God 'had marked the American people as his chosen nation, to finally lead in the regeneration of the world'.[55]

In the years to come American writers like J.F. Scheltema would write about America's new-found responsibilities as an emerging colonial power – without denying that it was by then an colonial power – while contrasting America's moral mission to that of the Europeans who had indulged in immoral dealings such as the opium trade in Asia.[56] Scheltema wrote that:

52 McDougall, p. 5.

53 See Gordon.

54 See Brody.

55 See Lears.

56 Scheltema had served as the editor of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, and in 1903 was arrested for his writings that were critical of the Dutch opium policy in the Dutch East Indies. In his article 'The Opium Trade in the Dutch East Indies' he noted that 'the instinct of America cannot be disregarded, and that has always been strongly opposed to England's course in dealing with the opium trade in China, and which will be strongly against any regulations which seems to give national sanction to the opium trade in the Philippines. Every man in this world is, in a sense, his brother's keeper. And when the white man sets up as commissioned by the divine will to conquer the earth, this holds doubly good. Yet the civilisation he brought to his unprotected, unwary, and confiding brethren in the East was like a visitation of the Evil one, his treatment of them a sink of iniquity. Of late, we hear a good deal of the "yellow peril" – certainly not an imaginary peril, but a peril of our own making. The yellow peril of the future – and the rapidly developing events in the Far East, may make it a peril of the very near future – is nothing but the child of that white peril the Asiatics know so well' (Scheltema, pp. 250-251.).

> America, in ever closer touch with the Far East, facing new problems of a colonial power, may remember the words of Pompey, who said, when a Spartan king pronounced that commonwealth happy which was bounded by the sword and the spear: 'Yea, rather that commonwealth I esteem truly happy which on every side is bounded by justice.'[57]

As a newcomer to the colonial game the United States (like Japan) had to learn how to govern a colony and manage it from a distance. The European powers had already perfected the art of 'suborn and rule', to borrow the phrase of Tharoor and the British had effectively dismantled most of the local structures of native rule in India.[58] But the British had no understanding of Indian social structures, and the solution that was arrived at was to simply to export British social customs and norms, straight from 'the rural arcadia of Tory England' to the colonies they conquered. Empire-building has also been a convenient way to externalize the problems of a country abroad, and Britain's imperial expansion was also a means through which the pent-up energies of Scottish nationalism could be channelled overseas.[59]

As Wolff has shown in his account of the United States' pacification of the Philippines, similar tactics and agendas were at work. Wolff has noted how the conquest of the Philippines was one of the unifying moments that brought together American soldiers who came from both sides of the North-South divide that were once bitterly opposed to each other during the American Civil War. Yet out in Southeast Asia Americans from both North and South were able to unite in the face of a common adversary: the Filipinos who were often disparagingly referred to as their 'little brown brothers', or on other occasions 'the Indians'.[60] It soon became clear that the Southeast Asians were not seen as equals in America's civilizing enterprise. Wolff's account of the conduct of Admiral Dewey sums up the attitude that was prevalent at the time:

> The Filipino flag on every little launch and canoe hustling cheerily about the bay struck him [Admiral Dewey] as an affront to the dignity of the American fleet. One day he swept up all the Filipino skippers and, on the

57 Scheltema, p. 250.

58 Tharoor, p. 49.

59 As Tharoor notes: 'a disproportionate number of Scots were employed in the colonial enterprise, as soldiers, sailors, merchants, agents and employees. Though Scots constituted barely 9 per cent of Britain's people, they accounted for 25 per cent of those employed by the British in India' (p. 41).

60 Wolff, pp. 124-125, 140-141.

> *Olympia*'s deck, lectured them to the effect that their national emblem was worthless and their 'mosquito fleet' an annoyance. When one Tagalog muttered something under his breath, Dewey asked for a translation. The interpreter said 'He says, sir, he will get even with you.' 'Throw that man overboard,' responded the admiral. The deed was done.[61]

Admiral Dewey would later be hailed as a hero back in the United States, and be promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral. Congress would authorize the purchase of a sword decorated with 22-karat gold fittings made by Tiffany and Co. of New York as token of the high regard they had for him. The war had proven to be hugely popular, despite opposition by groups like the American Anti-Imperialist League and some Democrat leaders who regarded it as naked imperialism at work, and President McKinley would be re-elected (though he would fall to an assassin's bullet in September 1901). His successor, Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), would continue to support America's naval expansion, and by the end of his second term in office the United States would have the second-largest naval fleet in the world.

The Filipinos, in turn, would be the first Southeast Asians to come under American colonial rule, and in the course of America's tutelage would be referred to as 'brown brothers', 'savages', 'children', 'Indians' and 'niggers'. During the Philippine-American War American newspapers and magazines featured many a cartoon that depicted the Filipinos as comical savages – in the 11 February 1899 issue of *Judge* magazine the Filipino leader Aguinaldo was presented in the form of the character Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with frizzy hair and bare feet, mouthing the words 'I's mighty wicked, I is.'[62] Another cartoon in *Puck* magazine (of 25 January 1899) bore the title 'School Begins', with the towering figure of Uncle Sam teaching the 'lesson of civilization' to four dark-skinned children named Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and Philippines; and Uncle Sam is seen saying 'Now children, you've got to learn these lessons whether you want to or not!'[63] In a later issue of *Puck* (31 January 1900), Uncle Sam is again seen standing over the cowering, bare-footed Filipinos, introducing a group of American female teachers as American troops are seen marching home in the background. The caption

61 Ibid., pp. 124-125.

62 See: *Judge* magazine, William J. Arkell, publisher, New York, 11 February 1899. Earlier in 1898 the cover of *Judge* featured a cartoon entitled 'Information Wanted' that presented the Philippines in the form of an African baby (11 June 1898). On 10 June 1899, the same magazine featured another cartoon entitled 'The Filipino's First Bath', which featured President McKinley giving a half-naked Filipino baby a bath.

63 *Puck* magazine, Keppler & Schwarzmann, New York, 25 January 1899.

read: 'You have seen what my sons can do in battle – now see what my daughters can do in peace.'[64] Later American doctors and scientists would experiment on Filipino prisoners of war, deliberately infecting captives with the bubonic plague, beriberi and cholera as Cina and Perper have documented.[65] If black lives did not matter back in America, native Southeast Asian lives did not matter overseas either. By the time American teachers were sent to the Philippines to 'civilize' the Filipinos, America had already embarked on a similar experiment with the Native Americans back home: The Carlisle Indian Industrial School (est. 1879) had been set up to 'save' Native Americans from themselves, founded on the belief that 'civilizing' the natives meant having to 'Kill the Indian to Save the Man.'

Despite the fact that Americans had been in Southeast Asia for more than a century, and that American travellers had written about the peoples and cultures of the region at length – with illustrations that accompanied their works – the Filipinos were repeatedly depicted in the American tabloid press as having black skin, flat noses and thick lips. The vocabulary of America's Wild West and the slave-owning South had arrived in the Philippines, along with American evangelism and free-market values. In July 1902, after more than three years of conflict, the Philippine-American War came to an end and the Philippines would come under American control. In May that year *Life* magazine featured on its cover a cartoon with the image of three American soldiers standing above a bound Filipino prisoner while administering the form of torture known as waterboarding. In the background the figures of European soldiers – a German, British, Spanish and French infantryman, respectively – are laughing away, and in unison cry out: 'Those pious Yankees cannot throw stones at us anymore!'[66] At long last, there was a corner of Southeast Asia where the Stars and Stripes would flutter in the breeze – alongside Britain's Union Jack and the tricolour of France and Holland. George Washington's republic of liberty had finally joined the club of empires.[67]

64 *Puck* magazine, Keppler & Schwarzmann, New York, 31 January 1900.

65 Cina and Perper, pp. 88-89.

66 *Life* magazine, New York, 22 May 1902, vol. 39, no. 1021.

67 America's conquest of the Philippines took place just as Britain was about to be engaged in the Second Boer War in South Africa that began in October 1899 and ended in May 1902. During the conflict the British had relied on troops drawn from their colonies all over the world: from Canada to Australia, as well as Africa. Fighting against a Boer force that utilized guerrilla tactics, the British did not hesitate to resort to their scorched earth policy and introduced concentration camps for the first time.

8 Conclusion

American Orientalism in Southeast Asia

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.[1]
> – Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

8.I American Orientalism: The contours of a new language-game, and its users

> Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization.[2]
> – Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto'

Much work has been done on the subject of America's role in Southeast Asia in the twentieth century, from the early 1900s to the Cold War and after. And the race-based policies and worldviews of successive American leaders have also been well documented by now.[3] Roosevelt wrote that the colonization of America was like that of Australia and New Zealand, where the 'aboriginal Americans' stood no chance in the face of Western advancement; and expressed his fear that in time the white settlers of South Africa 'would be swallowed up in the overwhelming mass of black barbarism'.[4] By the twentieth century America would be the home of scientific racism, eugenics and legalized racial segregation, and Roosevelt was not alone. President Woodrow Wilson's (1913-1921) attitudes towards non-white people were made clear both in his own writings as well as in the work of critical historians.[5] Members of America's elite like Harvard-educated millionaire Wickliffe Preston Draper (1891-1972) would use their wealth to promote their own brand of American social engineering – which in Draper's case led to the creation of his Pioneer Fund that was intended to promote the interests of pure white Americans above others.[6]

1 Foucault, p. 93.
2 Haraway, p. 293.
3 See Whitman.
4 Roosevelt, p. 14.
5 Wilson; see also Feagin; Turner-Sadler.
6 See Tucker.

The focus of this work, however, has been the opinions and worldviews of Americans who were present in Southeast Asia a century before that; and we have looked at the kind of writing that was used to justify that presence. As stated from the outset, this has been a book about books, and specifically about *American books* that were written by *American authors* on Southeast Asia. Rather than offer a blow-by-blow, step-by-step account of America's growing presence in Southeast Asia I have instead looked at how Americans came to understand the region and themselves in the books that they wrote, which places my own work in the field of critical discourse analysis and literary interpretation, which as Thapar has argued is invariably bound to any project of historical assessment.[7] Taking off from Barthes' observation that a text is never simply 'a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning, but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash',[8] I have proceeded along the lines of Hill's argument for continuous historical reassessment 'because although the past does not change, the present does'.[9]

What I have tried to do is give an account of how Americans in the nineteenth century saw Southeast Asia and themselves by extension; and how in their writings America's identity as a young nation-state was framed against the backdrop of a Southeast Asia that was its constitutive Other. This encounter, or series of encounters that stretched across a century, was an important episode in the history of both the United States as well as Southeast Asia, for the contact between Southeast Asians and Americans provided both with different understandings of who and what they were, and complicated the relationship between East and West even further.

For Americans Asia was a place of abundance and profit, but also cultural differences that could not be negotiated easily. In 1845 President John Tyler had asked Congress to approve his suggestion that a permanent minister or commissioner be appointed and sent to China, 'as in the case of certain Mohammedan states' that America already had dealings with.[10] Not all the members of the Senate were persuaded by Tyler's overtures to China: Caleb Cushing, in his reply to then Secretary of State John Calhoun, argued

7 As Romila Thapar has argued, 'evidence, no matter how reliable, and irrespective of whether it is an abstract fact from a text or a tangible object from an excavation, has to be interpreted' (p. 35).

8 Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.

9 Christopher Hill had argued that 'each generation asks new questions of the past, and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experiences of its predecessors' (p. 15).

10 Tyler, 'Message from the President', p. 1

that 'the United States ought not to concede to any foreign state, under any circumstances, jurisdiction over the life and liberty of any citizen of the United States, unless that foreign state be of our own family of nations; in a word, a Christian state.'[11] Cushing and other American politicians like him then believed in a neat distinction between Christian nations and other 'semi-barbarous' states 'where no Christian feels safe in subjection to the local authorities',[12] and he felt that America's treaty with China was flawed for it placed China on equal terms with America – a notion that Cushing rejected on the grounds that 'international law' was the outcome of relations between European states, which meant that international law was fundamentally Christian in character and applied only to Christian countries.[13]

Such views were widespread at the time. Notwithstanding their desire to set themselves apart from the Europeans of the Old World, the American authors we have looked at – diplomats, clergymen, soldiers and scientists – shared the same cultural and racial biases of nineteenth-century Europeans, as did many of their readers for whom their books were intended. By the end of the nineteenth century America's imagined community could imagine itself as an empire. Driven by the belief in its manifest destiny, energized by the desire to overcome and transcend the frontier – a motivation captured by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 essay 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History'[14] – and conscious of the fact that they had taken upon themselves the white man's burden (which Davidson later argued was really the black man's burden[15]), Americans ventured abroad well beyond the shores of North America. As America's presence grew in the Asia-Pacific, it became an Asia-Pacific power; and though most Americans at the time would never have the opportunity to travel so far, there emerged an American imaginary that saw American presence and interests everywhere. In the same way that the 19th century working man in Liverpool was concerned about the fate of the British Empire and may have been upset by news of a British defeat in Central Asia or the Sudan; American statesmen, policy-makers, writers and intellectuals imagined their country as something bigger.

How this came about – the reimagining of the United States as a global power and Southeast Asia as a region where American interests could be

11 Ibid., p. 12.
12 Ibid., p. 7.
13 Ibid., pp. 7, 8-9.
14 See Turner.
15 See Davidson.

realized – was done through writing in the public domain. In the works that were written during the nineteenth century American readers back home came to learn that their flag was planted in some remote corner of the world in their name (as Walter Gibson had done in his book, when he proudly announced the raising of the American flag in Sumatra).

Books have always been powerful things – for otherwise they would not have been written, or destroyed – and the books that were written by American travellers, adventurers and scientists of the nineteenth century were powerful instruments that helped discursively construct the idea of America as well as other parts of the world. The discursive construction of Southeast Asia in nineteenth-century American writings imagined, framed and reproduced a Southeast Asia that was endowed with a myriad of essentialist traits, and the same could be said of the writings that were produced on Africa, South America and the Arab world too. As Mudimbe has argued in his work *The Invention of Africa* (1988), though the scramble for Africa lasted less than a century that moment 'is still charged and controversial, since, to say the least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourses'.[16] The invention of Africa was not simply a process of carving up the continent and drawing lines on a map, but it also involved a host of discursive strategies and projects – that Mudimbe refers to as the *colonizing structure* – which also produced divisive categories and relegated entire societies, cultures and human beings to the margins.[17]

We have seen in the earlier chapters that the same discursive strategies were at work in the writings of the Americans who travelled to Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, even before America gained its first colony in the region. And in the manner that they, along with other Western European powers, discursively constructed the idea of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians, they also introduced typologies and hierarchies to the world of Southeast Asia that were not developed by Southeast Asians themselves.

The *American-ness* of the authors we have looked at can be read off their pages: When these men wrote about Southeast Asia's history, they often framed the region's past according to parameters they were familiar and comfortable with, judging Southeast Asia's development according to nineteenth-century standards of their own. And as Mudimbe has argued, 'history is a legend, an invention of the present – It is both a memory and a reflection of our present'.[18] The present then was the nineteenth century:

16 Mudimbe, p. 1.
17 Ibid., p. 4.
18 Ibid., p. 195.

a time when empire was deemed rational, reasonable and respectable. Yet at other times the somewhat puritan character of the young Americans, and their republican fervour, also set them apart – as Westerners who were white and Christian, yet different from Europeans. The net result of this is what I have described as American Orientalism in Southeast Asia, and the kind of writing we have looked at in this book – which bore the hallmarks of a growing republic that was both religiously and politically assertive in maintaining its sense of uniqueness.

8.II The gathering of minds: How the echo chamber was formed

> The fact that millions of people share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane.[19]
>
> – Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*

An assertiveness and a commonality of worldview can be seen in the works we have looked at. The present-day reader will note that the works of Reynolds, Warriner, Taylor, Roberts, Gibson, Bickmore and Vincent were written in reference to each other: Reynolds and Warriner both wrote about the same punitive expedition to Sumatra (though their judgement of the righteousness of the attack differed greatly). Roberts' account of his voyage to Cochinchina and Siam took off from the Sumatran expedition that Reynolds and Warriner wrote about, and referred to the debacle in Sumatra as one of the main justifications for a stronger American presence in Southeast Asia. Taylor's work also refers to the Sumatran expedition that Reynolds and Warriner had written about, and re-connects with the narrative of Roberts, whose grave he encounters in Macao. Bickmore's narrative in turn returns to the first American adventure in Southeast Asia – the attack on the *Friendship* – what was the prelude to both the First and Second Sumatran Expeditions, and the reason why Roberts had set out to the East Indies, to seek friendly allies who would support an American presence in that part of the world; and also re-traced the steps of Gibson. There was much inter-textuality between these writings, lending weight to the claim that these American writers belonged to a community of writers.

19 Fromm, p. 14.

With the exception of Reynolds and Warriner – who were both on the USS *Potomac* – the writers we have looked at did not travel to Southeast Asia on the same boat. They came at different times and visited different parts of Southeast Asia, yet though there was a significant distance between them – in years as well as miles – their views and opinions were remarkably alike. Significantly, almost none of them offered an unequivocally positive view of the Southeast Asians they met, though they were eager to point out whatever deficiencies – real or imagined – that they saw. And America's diplomats were no different: The United States' Resident in Singapore, Joseph Balestier, likewise thought of Southeast Asians as 'a demi-civilized people'.[20] Though their backgrounds and intentions differed in many ways, they were all Americans who were writing about America's adventures abroad in the East Indies, for the benefit of the American reading public at home. Thus by the closing decades of the nineteenth century there was already a body of work that can be described as the first examples of sustained American scholarship on Southeast Asia, and with that a discursive community as well.

I am not however claiming that all these authors thought and wrote in a homogenous way. That they arrived in Southeast Asia at different periods in American history meant that their concerns were also shaped and determined by the realities of their time. The early Americans were keen to seek trading allies and safe passage, while the latter Americans were keen to see America gain a colony in the region. This underscores the fact that America, like any other country, was also a project-in-making and we cannot think of the United States as a nation readily-constituted, whose identity was/is fixed and totalized. Even then there were contrarian voices who wrote against the grain of popular prejudice, and Francis Warriner deserves special mention as the author whose account of the attack on Sumatra contrasted to that of his fellow countrymen. Like John Anderson whose work I have looked at elsewhere[21] and who had the temerity to reject the biases that were prevalent in the British East India Company that he served, Warriner was also able to take an objective distance from events around him, and to his credit *did* try to see the world from the point of view of the Other. But like Anderson, Warriner's voice was that of a minority – albeit an important one – and in time his narrative would be swept beneath a growing tide of opinion that framed Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians as the Other.

20 Hale, p. 301.

21 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

This was the beginning of nineteenth-century American Orientalism, which has been written about by scholars like Little and Rosenblatt.[22] Little's and Rosenblatt's works have looked at America's imagining of the non-Western Other in terms of America's relations with the Arab world in particular, dating back to some of the earliest encounters between Americans and Arabs – as in the works of Mark Twain, who recounted his journey to the Middle East in his *Innocents Abroad* (1869). Other scholars have tended to focus more on America's relations with the Arab world in the wake of the Second World War, dating American Orientalism back to the mid-twentieth century. But Rosenblatt has argued that the framing of the Orient as the Other to the United States dates back much further, to the Barbary Wars of the early nineteenth century,[23] and goes on to note that it would be wrong to conclude that America was somehow untouched by the currents of Orientalist thought that were then prevalent in Europe.[24] Rather, she argues that:

> In America, Orientalism, as an expression of cultural superiority by means of material possession, had already taken root at a very early stage. This material Orientalism was primarily linked to the Far East until approximately the mid-nineteenth century.[25]

Parallel to this form of 'material Orientalism' that began to develop from the beginning of the nineteenth century was another form of imagining that likewise framed America as a country of white Anglo-Saxon yeomen against a cultural-racial Other, and this was the discursive construction of the 'Native American Indian' as the mirror opposite of the white American. Robert F. Berkhofer's work on the discursive construction of the 'Indian' as a *type* of Other notes how and why the idea of the 'Indian' was so important

22 See Little; Rosenblatt.

23 Rosenblatt, p. 52.

24 Rosenblatt takes issue with Edward Said's argument that Orientalism was a uniquely European phenomenon. She notes that 'Said argues that while the French and the British had a long tradition of Orientalism, Americans only began to explore Orientalist thinking during their period of political ascendancy immediately following World War II. Because Britain and France established deep colonial ties with the Middle and Far East, "to speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise." While Said is correct in his observations that the United States was not as deeply involved in the Middle East as Britain and France, it is inaccurate to assume that the United States was completely removed from all involvement with the Middle East, and that it was untouched by Orientalist thinking' (p. 52).

25 Ibid., p. 53.

from the early period of America's discovery to the birth of the American republic: The discovery of North America and the 'Indians' made it possible for Western identity to be set apart and placed at the top of a racial hierarchy that posited Western identity as something that was not only fixed and singular but also fully constituted. By juxtaposing the 'Indian' with the Westerner thus, the Native American served as the benchmark against which a Western identity could be framed. Be it in the form of the 'noble savage' or the tribal warrior, Native Americans were summarily lumped together as a race apart, that lacked what Westerners possessed: science, knowledge and power.[26] Berkhofer notes the important distinction between the original natives of the American continent and the idea of the 'Indian' as Other: While the former predated contact between Europe and America, the latter was a discursive construct that was the result of that contact:

> Since the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere neither called themselves by a single term or understood themselves as a collectivity, the idea and image of the Indian must be a white conception. Native Americans were and are real, but the *Indian* was and remains still largely a White image, if not stereotype.[27]

8.III 'Indians', Indians, Asians, and the disabled Native Other

Write a humanizing poem, my pen and paper goad me,
Show them how wrong their perceptions are.
But no, I put my pen down,
Because it's not the poem I want to write,
It's the poem I am reduced to.
Love us then, because if you need me to prove my humanity
I'm not the one that's not human.
– Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, 'This Is Not a Humanising Poem'

Herring has noted that American particularism and isolationism have often been overstated, but there was one aspect of American history that did make it different from the countries of Western Europe. America had, from its genesis, been a country whose history was bound to the history of colonialism. As Hoock has pointed out, during the country's war of independence

26 Berkhofer, pp. 33-61.
27 Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis in the original.

America's 'sons of liberty' were wont to dehumanize their internal enemies as savages and despicable animals (*orangotangs*, a Malay word of Southeast Asian origin, interestingly) – and this included not only the British and the loyalists who sided with them, but also entire Native American tribes and black slaves.[28] The United States' Declaration of Independence (1776) had listed a number of accusations against the King of Britain, including the indictment that 'he has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions'. And no matter how hard American leaders and writers of the nineteenth century attempted to present their country as a new republic that had freed itself from the shackles of colonial rule, it could not be denied that theirs was also a country haunted by the memory of violent settlement in the not-too-distant past – like the Freeling family in the film *Poltergeist* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1982), whose home was haunted by the ghosts from the old cemetery upon whose graves their idyllic suburban home had been built.

The expansion and settlement of American territory meant that white Americans had to engage with the natives of the land face-to-face, and as we have seen American history in the nineteenth century was a record of conflict and displacement, where thousands of Native Americans – still burdened with the misnomer 'Indians' – were forcibly relocated and compelled to assimilate to the new dominant Eurocentric culture of white America.[29] Native American tribes like the Mahicans had stood by the British and American colonists during the war against the French, and from among their ranks rose notable representatives like John Wannuaucon Quinney (1797-1855), who lamented the loss of the ancestral lands of his people. The fate of the Native Americans would be captured in the works of American authors like James Fenimore Cooper, whose *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) would eventually be regarded as an American classic[30] – but in time the Native American would be reduced to a trope and an overdetermined signifier that would be put to use in other contexts and language-games. America's Native American schools had been set up with the objective to 'Kill the Indian to

28 Hoock, pp. 36, 37-40.

29 Herring has noted that Andrew Jackson's reputation as a life-long 'Indian fighter' was well known by then, and that Jackson believed that the best way to deal with Native Americans was by abiding to the of code of 'an eye for an eye, a scalp for a scalp'. Hoock has also noted that the Iroquois were among the native tribes that suffered the most at the hands of Washington's army (Herring, p. 148; Hoock, pp. 395-396).

30 See Cooper.

Save the Man', and if the original inhabitants of America could be mowed down for the sake of progress and industry, it would not take too great a leap of faith to imagine the same being done abroad – notwithstanding America's earlier professions of neutrality and isolationism.[31]

The Americans who ventured to Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century brought with them their cultural vocabulary and memories of their country's past. It is telling that references to 'Indians' pepper the works that we have looked at in this book, like Dawkinsian memes that were shared among individuals with similar ideas.[32] From Fitch W. Taylor's recounting of jokes about catching and killing 'Indians' back home to Jeremiah Reynolds' comparison of the natives of Sumatra with the 'aborigines of our own country'.[33] Though Reynolds, in his defence of the American attack on Kuala Batu, had stated that 'we have made no conquests, dethroned no Sultans', his fellow Americans had by then conquered the lands of the Native Americans back home, and were still in the process of doing so.[34] And when he justified the use of violence against the Sumatran Malays of Kuala Batu his point of comparison was not the European adversaries of the United States, but 'the primitive proprietors of American soil'.[35] Walter Gibson had depicted the natives of Sumatra as weak, ignorant and child-like, 'like our Indians in America'.[36] And Albert Bickmore, guided as he was by his dogmatic Scientism, could only compare the people of Ambon and Ceram to 'our North American savages' back in the United States,[37] as did Young, who wrote a

31 The Carlisle Indian Industrial School for Native Americans – founded in 1879 by Captain Richard Henry Pratt in Carlisle, Pennsylvania – was one of the experimental institutions created to hasten the process of 'civilizing' Native Americans and bring them into the mainstream of American life. Based at a former army barracks the school was run like an army camp. The school enrolled Native American children who had been separated from their families, and who were taught basic skills such as carpentry, ironwork and cooking – while denying them the right to speak their native languages or practicing their cultural rites and rituals. To demonstrate their success, the school commissioned a series of 'before and after' portraits of their students where students were photographed first in their traditional attire and later in their Western school uniforms. (In some cases the photos were also manipulated to suggest that the 'civilized' natives had turned visibly whiter after being in the school for several years.) Despite the fact that the school received funding from the federal government, the number of graduates was comparatively low. See Adams, *Education for Extinction*.

32 See Dawkins.

33 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 14; Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 105.

34 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 98.

35 Ibid., p. 105.

36 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. 132.

37 Bickmore, p. 206.

decade later.[38] *Wherever these Americans went, the Native American followed*; and it was the Native American that often served as the first instance of the Other – setting the tone for later instances of othering that took place in the writings of the men whose works we have looked at.

As Fields and Fields have argued, this anomalous reality – of having a native population deemed alien and foreign in their own land – has been at core of America's 'racecraft' from the very beginning:

> From very early on, Americans wove racist concepts into a public language that made 'black' the virtual equivalent of 'poor' and 'lower class', thus creating a distinctive idiom that had no equivalent in other Western democracies. The French Revolution assigned universal validity to the slogan *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. By contrast, America's rendering of the same sentiments added asterisks, for it had to make sense of an anomalous reality: the presence of native-born people who were 'foreign', hardworking people who were not free. When Tocqueville sought to convey to French readers the racist prejudice he found in the United States [...] he proposed as an analogy the gut-level physical repugnance [French] aristocrats felt toward their equally white, but unequally born, compatriots.[39]

As the 'Indian-as-Other' could only be an American invention, opinions and attitudes towards Native Americans were invariably among the discursive props to the mise en scène of America's contact with Southeast Asia. While America's envoys like Townsend Harris were at pains to convince the rulers of Southeast Asia that America had no ill intentions with regards to their lands, the consolidation of American territory was continuing back home and American warships and soldiers were engaged in a battle of extermination against Native Americans.[40]

America was a country that already had its internal Others: the Native Americans whose lands were being taken away, and the African-American slaves who possessed no rights to speak of. In both instances these internal Others were seen as objects, rather than subjects of knowledge; and it thus comes as no surprise that the white American elite of the country were not inclined towards any meaningful form of empathy or communication with

38 Young, *Around the World*.

39 Fields and Fields, p. 11.

40 At the Battle of Seattle that took place in January 1856 American warships and marines were engaged in a 'battle of extermination' against Native Americans, and this was a war that was supported by the Governor of Washington Isaac Stevens. See Phelps.

them. Lévinas' notion of the *ethical relationship in the face of the Other* was clearly absent in white Americans' dealings with Native Americans and blacks, and there was no Lévinasian 'conversation-teaching' taking place back home.[41] As Americans ventured to Southeast Asia and had to negotiate the boundaries of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious difference, the same attitude towards the Southeast Asian Other was put on display. In the works we have looked at there are few instances of meaningful human contact and communication between the Americans and the Southeast Asians they meet and write about. Indeed in some instances we see an active denial on the part of the authors to acknowledge the intelligence and knowledge possessed by the Other: Edmunds spoke disparagingly of the Siamese and Cochinchinese he met, Gibson presents the Sumatrans and Javanese as 'dreamy Orientals' who seemed forever mentally absent, and Bickmore could not engage in a meaningful discussion about politics with the nobleman Raden Saleh of Java. Like the 'Indians' who they regularly refer to in their writings, the Southeast Asians who appear in these works are almost always two-dimensional, wooden and unworthy of conversation.

If listening to the voice of the Other and trying to learn from other cultures was not a priority for these authors, we need to ask the question: What, then, were these books *really* about; and can we learn anything from them at all?

8.IV Talking to themselves: American works on Southeast Asia as self-referential texts

> Herodotus and other Greeks of the Classical age were curious about the larger world, but ultimately their subject was Greece and they remained content to view the world through their own calendar.[42]
> – Frederick Starr, 'The Invention of World History'

> The 'discoveries' the West made were as much discoveries, and productions, of *itself* as of the peoples and lands encountered.[43]
> – Ali Rattansi, *Western Racisms, Ethnicities and Identities*

Men like Reynolds, Warriner, Roberts, Taylor, Gibson and Bickmore were among the first Americans to write about Southeast Asia; and though some

41 See Lévinas.
42 Starr, p. 2.
43 Rattansi, p. 36.

of them had laboured to cram as much information as they could into their respective accounts of the places they had visited, the majority of them were not scholars per se, and with the exception of Bickmore, their missions were not academic in nature or intent.[44] Roberts had set out on a diplomatic mission, while Reynolds, Warriner and Taylor were witnesses to an act of reprisal carried out by a vessel of war. None of them had any foreknowledge of the places they were about to visit, and none of them had undergone any kind of academic training prior to taking up the tasks they did. But in the manner that their works continued to repeat the same familiar tropes of the Southeast Asian Other as backward, savage and violent, they had also contributed to the kind of mass culture that Barthes has described as being self-referential and repetitive.[45]

That these works were later regarded as pioneering was and is true to the extent that they were indeed among the first works written by Americans about Southeast Asia. But they wrote at a time when the term 'Southeast Asian Studies' had not even been coined, and when the precise contours of Southeast Asia were not even demarcated clearly.[46] In the same way that the writings of the men of the British East India Company would later be regarded as the pioneering works on Southeast Asia, so were the works of these men later taken and read as the first instances of American scholarship on the Far East. But the works they produced were not really histories, or country studies, or philology, or philosophy in the strictest sense: They were basically reports and accounts, written for the benefit of Secretaries of State, Congressmen, investors, financiers and the American public in general; and they were meant to furnish their readers with information about the state of American interests in lands and seas thousands of miles away. The discursive community that these men belonged to was one populated by merchants and naval personnel, speculators and financiers, policy-makers

44 Jeremiah Reynolds' work was as extensive as Roberts', and many of the chapters he wrote were dedicated to the Southeast Asians and East Asians he met along his journey: Chapter 9 looked at the history of Sumatra; Chapter 10 at the Malays of Sumatra; Chapter 11 focused on the people of Minangkabau, Chapter 12 looked at European rivalry over Sumatra's wealth and markets; Chapter 13 looked at piracy among the Sumatran communities; Chapter 16 focused on Java and the Javanese people; Chapter 18 dwelt on Macao; Chapter 19 offered his views on the Chinese empire, and how little was then known about China (Reynolds, *Voyage*). Francis Warriner's work was equally comprehensive, and Chapters 6 to 8 were focused on Kuala Batu and the attack on the settlement; Chapters 9 to 11 looked at the community of S00-S00; Chapters 12 to 15 focused on Batavia and the communities of Java; while Chapters 17 to 18 were on the subject of China and all things Chinese (Warriner, *Cruise*).

45 Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte*.

46 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

and bureaucrats; but they had one thing in common, which was the desire to see American commerce flourish across the world, and to establish an American presence in Southeast Asia to secure precisely that.

These men left their homeland and ventured out to Southeast Asia, yet they never forgot the fact that they remained Americans abroad; and the works that they produced were intended to be read back home by their fellow Americans – a practice that Kabbani noted is common to societies that possess a high degree of political power, for 'the traveller begins his journey with the strength of an empire sustaining him – albeit from a distance – militarily, economically, intellectually; he feels compelled to note down his observations in the awareness of a particular audience: his fellow country-men'.[47] In the manner that some of these authors saw the world of Southeast Asia and wrote about the region and its peoples, we can see the proclivity towards the creation of neat categories and typologies, which was and is very much a feature of modernity and the Enlightenment project. As noted by Rattansi and Westwood, modern politics and modern colonialism were always uneasy 'with ambiguities and ambivalences which disturb and destabilize neat boundaries and borders'.[48] Albert Bickmore's inclination to order and arrange the different communities of the Malay Archipelago according to a ranking from 'semi-civilized' to 'savage and barbaric' communities comes to mind; and in the writing of Gibson we saw a manifest disinclination towards the blurring of ethnic-racial boundaries in the way in which he presented mixed-blood Asians as 'monstrous' and 'grotesque' mongrels.

There is also no getting around the fact that the authors we have looked at were not only white Americans, but also white *men*; and there is evidently a gender element in their works that can be seen in the manner in which they had framed themselves as upright, virile Christian males in an exotic land of danger. As Rattansi has noted, there was always a link between the masculine aspect of colonization and exploration to the manner in which the Other was framed in gendered terms, as the feminine Other waiting to be explored, penetrated and eventually conquered/dominated; this holds true for America in particular, for even the name *America* was a feminized rendition of the name Amerigo; and other territories such as Virginia were feminized as well.[49] Long before Americans ventured to Southeast Asia – and other parts of Asia and Africa – they had ventured into the land that would

47 Kabbani, p. xi.
48 Rattansi, p. 24.
49 Ibid., p. 44.

become their home, and this venture was always a masculine enterprise where the identity of the white male pioneer would be tested and cast in bold relief against the backdrop of a hostile, but ultimately yielding, environment.[50]

Occasionally a hyper-masculine touch can be seen in the writings we have looked at. Reynolds, Warriner and Taylor placed great emphasis on the dangers they faced, and in the case of Taylor in particular his account of the bombing and burning of Kuala Batu and Meukek bordered on the sadistic, as he relished the spectacle of Sumatran settlements burned to the ground. Edmunds was disgusted by the 'unmanly' behaviour of the Siamese and Cochinchinese, while Bickmore placed emphasis on the dangers he faced – from earthquakes to venomous creatures creeping about him as he explored. Gibson's narrative went further, and comes complete with the figure of the young helpless native girl, who along with the 'dreamy' natives of the East Indies was awaiting deliverance at the hands of a superior white man. (The trope of the vulnerable native female Other was hardly new: Herman Melville's first novel *Typee* (1846) already had the character of Fayaway, who is astoundingly beautiful and exotic but bereft of agency.[51]) In some instances allusions are made to the ambiguous gender identity of the Southeast Asians they wrote about (as in Bickmore's work), and how Southeast Asian men and women looked alike – with neither masculine nor feminine characteristics dominant. In all their works, the elements of danger, adventure, adversity and sacrifice are emphasized; and manly traits are personified in the authors themselves; while the natives are continually cast as weak, servile, ignorant and unable to uplift themselves. Again Francis Warriner stands out, as the lone contrarian voice that condemned the excessive violence that he witnessed in Sumatra – though by his own account his pacifist views were not popular among the crew of the *Potomac*.

Invariably, the question of agency and responsibility arises. Present-day readers may be shocked and offended by the opinions expressed by the authors we have looked at. Though I for one am not inclined to argue the cause for 'trigger warnings' to be affixed to books, one is never quite ready to digest glib and sweeping comments about native peoples as 'savages' or 'primitives', no matter what mood they may be in at the moment. When Reynolds describes the entire population of Sumatra as '*tout ensemble*

50 See Turner.

51 Melville, *Typee*.

degenerate'[52]; when Roberts labels the Siamese as an 'unmanly, cringing people'[53]; when Taylor depicts the Malays as a 'treacherous', 'miserable' race[54]; when Bickmore dismisses the Ambonese and Javanese as 'idle' and 'frenzied savages', 'indicative of their low rank in the human family'[55]; when Gibson presents the Sumatrans and Javanese as 'childlike' and in need for tutelage 'like our Indians in America'[56] – these were not words that randomly landed on the pages they wrote. The authors we have studied were not beef-witted, and they did not find themselves in the middle of Southeast Asia by accident. (The only one among them who could claim that he had coddiwompled all the way to Sumatra was Walter Gibson, though both the report and novel he wrote later were studied pieces of work.) They had all ventured to the East Indies for a purpose, and their writings were likewise guided and deliberate. In other words, *they knew what they were doing.*

We need to account for the similarities that can be read off the pages of these books, and understand how a discursive community made up of such white American authors came about. Here Foucault's *peasant-turned-soldier* comes to mind, and is instructive in many ways: The soldier, having being disciplined and trained in the art of war, is still the same biological-physical entity that he was when he was a peasant. He is the same man, but a different person, now endowed with a different set of values, rules and norms. The authors we have looked at were also the products of the age they lived in. Though Ellis has noted that the population of America was relatively small when the republic achieved its independence, there was already an American revolutionary generation and an elite among them.[57] As America's population expanded throughout the nineteenth century and the country extended its borders all the way to the Pacific coast, that community of policy-makers, writers, intellectuals, clergymen and scientists did not decline in number or wane in importance. America would absorb more and more new citizens – men like Levi Strauss, the father of blue jeans who hailed from Bavaria; the Serbian inventor Nikola Tesla and Hungarian-born journalist Joseph Pulitzer – but there remained an American core that was defined by race and religion, and would continue to define America in turn. These authors were part of that core constituency that defined America in the

52 Reynolds, *Voyage*, p. 162.
53 Roberts, *Embassy*, p. 285.
54 Taylor, *The Flag Ship*, vol. 1, p. 268.
55 Bickmore, pp. 34, 61-62, 197, 429.
56 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, pp. 132-133.
57 Ellis, *Founding Brothers*.

nineteenth century, and though their roles were different – some of them being mariners, others diplomats or scholars – they were nonetheless closer to the centre of America's core identity.

It was there, in the world of letters and opinions that were shared among those who were closer to power and policy-makers in the country, that the rites and rituals of mutuality and association were set. Among the men who knew that they were in positions of power and privilege, and who felt that their opinions counted and could sway policy, emerged writings that were intended to inform and direct. The works of Reynolds, Taylor, Roberts, Gibson, Bickmore etc. were intended to be read by those who mattered in American society then, and in the case of Roberts was obviously meant to affect changes in American trade policy and diplomacy as well. (Francis Warriner was the lone voice that was able to take a step back and reflect upon his own cultural perspectivism while writing about Asians, and willing to cast a critical eye upon his own culture and society.[58])

As these ideas were repeated again and again, and reproduced in various media from reports to novels to newspapers, a new *language-game* – to borrow Wittgenstein's term – came into being.[59] Wittgenstein has shown how language is never simply language, and that in order to understand how a particular type of writing or utterance may make sense we need to locate it in its proper context of use. As America's politicians, technocrats, naval officers and diplomats continued to talk about America's destiny, its new role as a Pacific power and its future role as a liberating force across the globe, terms like *the empire of liberty*, *destiny* and *freedom* came to have new meanings specific to the discourse they shared. This was a process of re-defining the old in terms of the new that could be traced all the way back to the struggle of America's founding fathers. That these words would come to have such new political meanings was not a haphazard instance of signifiers spinning out of control, but rather the outcome of collective processes where men came together to collectively define them to suit their aims and interests; and as Wittgenstein has also noted such learning of language 'is not explanation, but training'.[60] It was this process of consensus-building that Tocqueville had detected early on in the fledgling republic that fascinated him so, when he wrote about the emergence of group-thinking among the country's elite: For 'when a small number of the

58 Warriner, *Cruise*, pp. 208-209.

59 See Wittgenstein.

60 Ibid., p. 4.

same men are engaged at the same time upon the same object, they easily concert with one another, and agree upon certain leading rules which are to govern one and all'.[61]

American Orientalist discourse was thus a language-game in its own right, with rules that governed how it could and should be used. (In the same way that lying and joking are also language-games with their specific sets of rules; the first rule of lying being not to tell the truth.) And because all language-games are rule-governed, there is also nothing innate, essential or natural about them, and they have to be learned. (We have to learn how to joke and lie, and none of us – despite what we may have been told at school – are really 'born liars' or 'born jokers'.)

It is here that we locate the agency and responsibility of the authors we have looked at in this book. Guided by their belief that American ascendancy and free trade went hand-in-hand, they were as committed to the expansion of America's trading networks as they were opposed to anything and anyone who would stand in their way. The fact that their works contained such references to 'uncivilized savages' and 'backward societies' was not a case of the whisky taking control of the pen. In the manner in which they cobbled together their narratives in such a structured way – and in the case of Gibson, with considerable literary flourish as well – demonstrates how the stories they told were managed and stage-set by themselves. That Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians feature as the constitutive Other to the America they foregrounded in such positive terms shows how the juxtaposing was not accidental. That these were books about Americans and for Americans to read accounts for the nationalist flavour in all of them, though here it ought to be noted that the America-centrism of the authors was hardly unique. Elsewhere in my reading of British authors writing on Southeast Asia during the same period I have noted the same kind of self-serving nationalism at work in the writings of Raffles, Crawfurd, Keppel, Mundy et al.[62]

Orientalism's dialectics necessarily framed the Other in terms that were disabling and impoverishing: What I have tried to show in the close reading of these works produced in the nineteenth century is how the Southeast Asian Other was always presented as being too slow, too lazy, too backward, too savage, irrational, and so on. As America took up its responsibility as a civilizing power – a role that was modelled upon the other European imperial powers at the time – Americans began to

61 Tocqueville, p. 59.

62 Noor, *Discursive Construction*.

view the Southeast Asian Other in terms that were starkly in contrast to themselves. In the same way that the Native Americans would never be civilized enough to assimilate into mainstream American society, America's future colonial subjects in Asia would likewise be destined to fail, despite all the attempts of America's legion of teachers, bureaucrats and colonial administrators. Herein lay the catch of colonial tutelage: The door to civilization was always left wide open, and the native Other was always invited (or compelled) to enter 'whether they liked it or not' – but they would never be good enough to enter that civilized space as equals, and would always remain at the threshold, as the subjugated and *almost-civilized* Other who stood between the modern rational Western subject and primordial savagery.

The reader may be hard-pressed to learn much about Southeast Asia or Southeast Asians in these works, for Asia and Asians are presented in terms that are often stereotypical and grotesque. But these works also tell us something about how the educated literary class of America viewed the rest of the world then, and – in an almost confessional way – lay bare the prejudices of the age they lived in. How Americans viewed racial difference and how they dealt with cultural and religious diversity can be read off the pages of their works, as the authors made their biases known.

The other confessional aspect of the works we have looked at is how they also reveal – by neglect or omission – the political slant of the authors themselves. While none of the authors explicitly declared their party-political loyalties (though Gibson did rail against the 'political sharks of Washington' who thwarted his ambition[63]) they also failed to note the heated political debates that were raging back home, on pressing matters such as the question of slavery, native rights and workers' rights. Had their works been read by someone with no knowledge of American history at all, he or she would not realize that while men like Taylor, Gibson, Edmunds and Bickmore were writing about America's mission to civilize the natives of Southeast Asia there were other Americans – such as the Mahican representative John Wannuaucon Quinney (1797-1855), Joseph Weydemeyer (1818-1866), William Sylvis (1828-1869), Eugene Victor Debs (1855-1926) and Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) – who took up the causes of the American working class and also black and Native Americans, through bodies such as the American Workers' League (est. 1852), the National Labour Union (est. 1866), the American Anti-Imperialist League (est. 1898) and later the National Negro Business League (est. 1900). Nor would he or she be aware of the fact that one of

63 Gibson, *The Prison of Weltevreden*, p. 303.

the most popular works of American fiction to emerge in the nineteenth century was the futuristic-utopian work *Looking Backward* (1888) by the barrister-turned-journalist Edward Bellamy (1850-1898), where the author imagined another America of the future that was free of monopolies and private property ownership.[64]

An allusion to these political debates at home would have complicated our understanding of American identity then, but the authors we have looked at were not in the business of writing complicated texts with cloudy boundaries. And in the manner in which these writings reveal a lot about their authors and the milieu they inhabited, they also chronicle America's evolution in the nineteenth century – as the country that was once a colony grew to become a colonial power itself.

8.V The stories we tell: America and Southeast Asia's entanglement, then and now

> This globe, and as far as we can see this universe, is a theatre of vicissitudes.[65]
> – John Adams

> No one would advance a 'large friendly dog' theory of US diplomatic history.[66]
> – Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*

This book began with a mention of the *Massachusetts Centinel and the Republican Journal*'s condemnation of King George III and the British East India Company in 1784, for their wrong-doings in India and Britain's penchant for empire-building. In the space of a century American attitudes had changed, and by the 1890s the American press was at the forefront of America's own empire-building enterprise; and the American public grew increasingly supportive of their country's new role as a civilizing influence in Asia. To quote the cartoon that appeared on the pages of *Puck* entitled 'School Begins', America's new colonies had to learn the lessons of civilization that America was about to teach, *whether they liked it or not!*[67] Another important detail that can be seen in the same cartoon is the blackboard

64 See Bellamy.
65 Quoted in Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, p. 235.
66 McDougall, p. 6.
67 *Puck* magazine, New York, Keppler & Schwarzmann, 31 January 1900.

that stands by the wall on the right. On the board the following lines were written for all the 'students' to see:

> England has governed her colonies whether they consented or not,
> By not waiting for their consent
> She greatly advanced the world's civilisation.
> The U.S. must govern its new territories with or without their consent,
> Until they can govern themselves.

Just how the founding fathers of America's revolutionary generation would have reacted to such a lesson is an open question, but we should not be surprised by the change in attitude towards colonialism and imperialism by then, for as Immerman has noted, for much of the latter nineteenth century 'Americans considered the word *empire* benign'.[68] Indeed, one of the most startling and evident changes that took place in the United States in the nineteenth century was how America and Americans came to embrace imperialism as something positive, and in the course of doing so repaired its relations with the 'Old World' of Western Europe. America's bond with Britain in particular had been renewed by then, and it was a bond that was based on race and theories of racial difference shared between the elites of both countries. This concord of values and worldviews is something that has been highlighted in the work of Vucetic, who has noted that:

> In an ideal-typical reading of American and British discourses of identity in the 1890s, there are several similarities. The elites in both societies strongly identified with Protestantism, modernity and civilization. [...] And civilization combined with Modernity to imply competition and progress in a world divided into nations, states and empires. The last three terms were used interchangeably with races, human collectives coded by geography and/or physiognomy.[69]

By the end of the nineteenth century the Anglo-American divide had been healed. In 1897 the *New York Times* declared that 'We are a part, and a great part, of the Greater Britain which seems plainly destined to dominate this planet.'[70] And while the American press went about extolling America's virtues and role as part of this 'Greater British' global power, British politicians

68 Immerman, p. 6.
69 Vucetic, p. 25.
70 Quoted in ibid., p. 22.

were equally happy to reciprocate, 'to establish and maintain bonds of permanent amity with our kinsmen across the Atlantic', as declared by Britain's Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. For the British had by then come to see Americans 'as a powerful and generous nation', who 'speak our language' and 'are bred of our race'.[71] The Anglosphere that was being developed was one that was racialized from the start; and one that saw Anglo-Americans as one race, poised to explore, and eventually dominate, the world.

When looking back at America's role in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century from the perspective of today's geopolitical realities, one is almost stunned by the 'improbability of the achievement', to borrow Ellis' phrase. Whatever pretence and lofty ideals that once guided that enterprise have been laid bare by scholars like Williams, who have summed up that era as one where 'the routine lust for land, markets and security became justifications for noble rhetoric about prosperity, liberty and security'.[72] And though Immerman has argued that America 'was always an empire' (basing his argument upon his close reading of the works of American public figures from Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams, William Henry Seward and Henry Cabot Lodge[73]), much of the work that has been done by American historians and scholars of geopolitics from the 1990s until today has looked at America after the era of empire, and how the breakdown of the world order that America had tried to build has led to *blowback*, the discrediting of America's reputation overseas, and an America that today can no longer go it alone.[74] Though there remain those who argue that America's imperial ambitions have not truly waned[75] and that America has never really left behind the legacy of racism in its dealings with others,[76] the America that once pined to spread its influence across the globe is now contemplating the prospect of building a wall along its border with Mexico to keep Mexicans out – though as we have seen in the previous chapters keeping non-white foreigners out of the country is hardly a new idea, and was in fact the trend for much of the nineteenth century.

In this current state of flux, some analysts have declared the death of America's 'pivot to Asia', claiming that 'the language of rebalance' will not be returning anytime soon. Panda has noted that 'successive Obama

71 Joseph Chamberlain, speech in Birmingham, 13 May 1899; quoted in ibid., p. 22.
72 Williams, p.1.
73 Immerman, p. 4.
74 See Bacevich; Fulbright and Tillman; Gaddis; Herring; Hoock; Johnson, *Blowback*; Nye; Todd.
75 See Maier.
76 See Fields and Fields.

administration officials emphasized that the United States had always been a Pacific power and would continue to be one through the 21st century',[77] while the Trump administration has opted for a piecemeal approach to Asia instead that is not anchored to any grand narrative with regards to America's role in Asia. Today, as Southeast Asia braces itself in anticipation of tension and conflict between the superpowers in the South China Sea; and considers its options after the apparent retreat of America from the region, we can see that age-old rivalries have not disappeared. At the heart of these rivalries is the question of trade – which was one of the reasons why America extended its power all the way to Southeast Asia in the first place, and one of the factors that contributed to the rise of the American Empire in the East.

Green has shown that America's arrival in Southeast Asia and the Pacific was neither accidental nor simply providential, but was a long-drawn project aimed at expanding the United States' trading networks as well as a means to project American influence abroad.[78] But America's engagement with Southeast and East Asia was also intended to secure the Asia-Pacific theatre as America's backyard, and to ensure that no threat that could ever emanate from Asia would travel eastward and jeopardize America's own security. By the middle of the twentieth century successive American administrations would seek to secure American interests in Southeast Asia even further, and to prevent that part of the world from falling into the hands of the Communists. It was during the Cold War that America's hand was seen in the clearest light, as Washington helped prop up the regimes of Fedinand Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia and Ngo Dinh Diem of Southern Vietnam – while America's adversaries in Beijing and Moscow did the same in other parts of the region. America has always justified its presence in Southeast Asia (and other parts of Asia) on the grounds that it is a force for good and peace, and that America has been able to provide a security umbrella for its allies. But as Loo has argued, 'just because nothing happens does not necessarily mean that deterrence has held. Similarly, the absence of an outbreak of armed conflict between otherwise adversarial states in any region cannot be absolutely attributed to the presence of US military forces.'[79]

America's imprint on Southeast Asia however can be dated back to the century before, and many of the themes and agendas of the nineteenth

77 See Panda.
78 See Green.
79 Loo, p. 2.

century remain with us today, as can be seen in the way that America continues to hector some of the countries of Asia about issues related to human rights and democracy. The American government continues to complain about Chinese and Southeast Asian business practices, and cites instances of dumping, protectionism and even cyber-espionage and sabotage as constant irritants; though these complains can be dated back to the time of the Obama administration and are not really new either. Yet America has also appropriated Asia and things Asian whenever it has served its interests, and this is particularly evident in the manner in which Asia has served as the backdrop to the stories that it wishes to tell to itself and the world – from the Hollywood comedy *Road to Singapore* (dir. Victor Schertzinger, 1940) to the recent remake of the Japanese manga classic *Ghost in the Shell* starring Scarlett Johansson, which was criticized by anime purists as being both Americanized and whitewashed.[80]

Southeast Asians' attitudes towards America are equally complex, and it would be difficult to arrive at a definitive summary of attitudes across the region. Compounding matters is the fact that in some quarters of Southeast Asia Southeast Asians themselves have not been able to come to a final judgement about the merits or demerits of the Western colonial enterprise. Hannigan, for instance, has noted that among some of the elite in Indonesia there is even a sense of regret that the country was colonized by the Dutch rather than the British – though he argues that the impact of colonialism on the people of the archipelago would probably have been the same regardless of which imperial flag flew above their heads.[81] Other scholars like Carey have been engaged in the process of recovering the forgotten subaltern native voices that were silenced as a result of empire's victory in the East,[82] while Alatas was among the first to chip away at the ideological edifices that were built during the colonial era, exposing the extent to which some post-colonial Southeast Asians have themselves internalized and reproduced the very same ideas, tropes and agendas of the Orientalist discourse that was used to categorise all Asians as lazy, backward and savage.[83] In some parts of Southeast Asia such as Vietnam and Cambodia the memory of the United States is invariably comingled with the memory of American bombs being dropped on civilian targets, while in parts of the region with Muslim-majority populations such as Indonesia America is remembered for

80 See Lane.

81 See Hannigan.

82 Carey, *The Archive of Yogyakarta*; Carey, *The British in Java*.

83 Alatas, *Thomas Stamford Raffles*; Alatas, *The Myth*.

its conduct in the Arab-Muslim world and the role it has played in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and recently Syria. Yet across Southeast Asia America's cultural imprint (or rather its pop-cultural imprint) is everywhere to be seen: From the mega-malls that festoon the urban landscape to the fast food Southeast Asians eat and the clothes they wear.

Among the political elites of Southeast Asia however, a different image of America emerges, which sees the United States as the only superpower that can provide the region with the security umbrella it badly needs, and a trading partner it cannot do without. Successive American administrations have dealt with Southeast Asia as cluster of states, sometimes on a country-by-country basis; and though Southeast Asia has been important in Washington's geostrategic calculations it was always part of a bigger picture where other parts of Asia were deemed more vital.[84] While some countries – like Indonesia – have been placed higher in America's ranking of priorities, Washington has also made it clear that it is concerned about how some Southeast Asian states have moved away from the fold, and tried to balance America's influence by courting other rising powers such as China.[85]

Notwithstanding the gloomy prognosis of some analysts who see America retreating from Southeast Asia and the South China Sea turned into the future watery battleground between America and China, a more reasonable assumption to make is that America is certainly not about to disappear and its interest in Southeast Asia – however marginal – is not likely to wane.[86] Some American analysts have opined that notwithstanding the changes at the top of America's government, the Trump administration may not be all that different from previous administrations after all.[87]

America will not, in all probability, cease to be a Pacific as well as Atlantic power, and therein lies its uniqueness. Southeast Asia, on the other hand, will remain at the crossroads between East and West, and will remain exposed to external variable factors it cannot control, and international actors far larger than its constituent parts can manage. The relationship between

84 Parameswaran, 'Trump's Real ASEAN Test'.

85 As Prashanth Parameswaran has argued, the 'strategic logic of a stronger US-Indonesia partnership is clear. Indonesia wants to cement ties with major players such as United States to support its rise as a regional power with global interests, while Washington needs to engage emerging power' and it was this common interest that prompted America to upgrade its relationship with Indonesia from a comprehensive partnership in 2010 to a strategic partnership in 2014 (Parameswaran, 'Trump's Indonesia Challenge').

86 See Dwyer.

87 Twining has argued that 'for all the focus on Trump's personality, his unorthodox presidency may yield a more traditional focus on deploying American power for broader ends'.

these two parts of the world: one a major superpower that emerged from a colony, and the other an assembly of former colonies now transformed into a cluster of small, competitive and at times bickering nation-states, will remain complex, fraught and overdetermined. The story of how these two parts of the world came together and met has been the subject of this book; and as I have tried to show, the invention of Southeast Asia – *as a land of plenty, as a realm of the exotic and different, as a place of danger, and as a stage for white masculine agency* – was a long-drawn process of discursive construction that began in the nineteenth century, and a product of a kind of writing that can be best described as American Orientalism.

Appendix A

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Siam and the United States by governments of the Kingdom of Siam and the Republic of the United States of America, otherwise known as the Edmund Roberts Treaty (1833)

The Kingdom of Siam was the first sovereign state in Southeast Asia that opened formal relations with the United States of America.

Full text of the America-Siam Treaty:

His Majesty the Sovereign and Magnificent King in the City of Sia-Yut'hia, has appointed the Chau Phaya-Phraklang, one of the first Ministers of State, to treat with Edmund Roberts, Minister of the United States of America, who has been sent by the Government thereof, on its behalf, to form a treaty of sincere friendship and entire good faith between the two nations. For this purpose the Siamese and the citizens of the United States of America shall, with sincerity, hold commercial intercourse in the Ports of their respective nations as long as heaven and earth shall endure.

This Treaty is concluded on Wednesday, the last of the fourth month of the year 1194, called Pi-marong-chat-tavasok, or the year of the Dragon, corresponding to the 20th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1833. One original is written in Siamese, the other in English; but as the Siamese are ignorant of English, and the Americans of Siamese, a Portuguese and a Chinese translation are annexed, to serve as testimony to the contents of the Treaty. The writing is of the same tenor and date in all the languages aforesaid. It is signed on the one part, with the name of the Chau Phaya-Phraklang, and sealed with the seal of the lotus flower, of glass. On the other part, it is signed with the name of Edmund Roberts, and sealed with a seal containing an eagle and stars.

One copy will be kept in Siam, and another will be taken by Edmund Roberts to the United States. If the Government of the United States shall ratify the said Treaty, and attach the Seal of the Government, then Siam will also ratify it on its part, and attach the Seal of its Government.

Article 1
There shall be a perpetual Peace between the Magnificent King of Siam and the United States of America.

Article 2

The Citizens of the United States shall have free liberty to enter all the Ports of the Kingdom of Siam, with their cargoes, of whatever kind the said cargoes may consist; and they shall have liberty to sell the same to any of the subjects of the King, or others who may wish to purchase the same, or to barter the same for any produce or manufacture of the Kingdom, or other articles that may be found there. No prices shall be fixed by the officers of the King on the articles to be sold by the merchants of the United States, or the merchandise they may wish to buy, but the Trade shall be free on both sides to sell, or buy, or exchange, on the terms and for the prices the owners may think fit. Whenever the said citizens of the United States shall be ready to depart, they shall be at liberty so to do, and the proper officers shall furnish them with Passports: Provided always, there be no legal impediment to the contrary. Nothing contained in this Article shall be understood as granting permission to import and sell munitions of war to any person excepting to the King, who, if he does not require, will not be bound to purchase them; neither is permission granted to import opium, which is contraband; or to export rice, which cannot be embarked as an article of commerce. These only are prohibited.

Article 3

Vessels of the United States entering any Port within His Majesty's dominions, and selling or purchasing cargoes of merchandise, shall pay in lieu of import and export duties, tonnage, licence to trade, or any other charge whatever, a measurement duty only, as follows: The measurement shall be made from side to side, in the middle of the vessel's length; and, if a single-decked vessel, on such single deck; if otherwise, on the lower deck. On every vessel selling merchandise, the sum of 1700 Ticals, or Bats, shall be paid for every Siamese fathom in breadth, so measured, the said fathom being computed to contain 78 English or American inches, corresponding to 96 Siamese inches; but if the said vessel should come without merchandise, and purchase a cargo with specie only, she shall then pay the sum of 1,500 ticals, or bats, for each and every fathom before described. Furthermore, neither the aforesaid measurement duty, nor any other charge whatever, shall be paid by any vessel of the United States that enters a Siamese port for the purpose of refitting, or for refreshments, or to inquire the state of the market.

Article 4

If hereafter the Duties payable by foreign vessels be diminished in favour of any other nation, the same diminution shall be made in favour of the vessels of the United States.

Article 5
If any vessel of the United States shall suffer shipwreck on any part of the Magnificent King's dominions, the persons escaping from the wreck shall be taken care of and hospitably entertained at the expense of the King, until they shall find an opportunity to be returned to their country; and the property saved from such wreck shall be carefully preserved and restored to its owners; and the United States will repay all expenses incurred by His Majesty on account of such wreck.

Article 6
If any citizen of the United States, coming to Siam for the purpose of trade, shall contract debts to any individual of Siam, or if any individual of Siam shall contract debts to any citizen of the United States, the debtor shall be obliged to bring forward and sell all his goods to pay his debts therewith. When the product of such bona fide sale shall not suffice, he shall no longer be liable for the remainder, nor shall the creditor be able to retain him as a slave, imprison, flog, or otherwise punish him, to compel the payment of any balance remaining due, but shall leave him at perfect liberty.

Article 7
Merchants of the United States coming to trade in the Kingdom of Siam and wishing to rent houses therein, shall rent the King's Factories, and pay the customary rent of the country. If the said merchants bring their goods on shore, the King's officers shall take account thereof, but shall not levy any duty thereupon.

Article 8
If any citizens of the United States, or their vessels, or other property, shall be taken by pirates and brought within the dominions of the Magnificent King, the persons shall be set at liberty, and the property restored to its owners.

Article 9
Merchants of the United States, trading in the Kingdom of Siam, shall respect and follow the laws and customs of the country in all points.

Article 10
If thereafter any foreign nation other than the Portuguese shall request and obtain His Majesty's consent to the appointment of Consuls to reside in Siam, the United States shall be at liberty to appoint Consuls to reside in Siam, equally with such other foreign nation.

Whereas, the undersigned, Edmund Roberts, a citizen of Portsmouth, in the State of New Hampshire, in the United States of America, being duly appointed as Envoy, by Letters Patent, under the Signature of the President and Seal of the United States of America, bearing date at the City of Washington, the 26th day of January, in the year of our Lord 1832, for negotiating and concluding a Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States of America and His Majesty, the King of Siam.

Now know ye, that I, Edmund Roberts, Envoy as aforesaid, do conclude the foregoing Treaty of Amity and Commerce, and every Article and Clause therein contained; reserving the same, nevertheless, for the final Ratification of the President of the United States of America, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate of the said United States.

Done at the Royal City of Sia-Yut'hia (commonly called Bangkok), on the 20th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1833, and of the Independence of the United States of America the 57th.

Appendix B

The United States-Brunei Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation (1850)

In early April 1845 the American heavy frigate the USS *Constitution* arrived at the port city of Brunei, and American-Brunei relations can be dated back to that first visit. The United States-Brunei Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation was signed on 23 June 1850 and was finally ratified and proclaimed by President Franklin Pierce on 12 July 1854.

Full text of the treaty:

His Highness Omar Ali Saifeddin ebn Marhoum Sultan Mahomed Jamalil Alam and Pangiran Anak Mumin to whom belong the Government of the Country of Brunei and all its provinces and dependencies, for themselves and their descendants, on the one part, and the United States of America, on the other, have agreed to cement the friendship which has happily existed between them, by a Convention containing the following Articles.

Article 1
Peace, friendship, and good understanding shall from henceforward and for ever subsist between the United States of America and His Highness Omar Ali Saifeddin, Sultan of Brunei and their respective successors and Citizens and Subjects.

Article 2
The Citizens of the United States of America shall have full liberty to enter into, reside in, trade with, and pass with their merchandize through all parts of the dominions of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, and they shall enjoy therein all the privileges and advantages with respect to commerce or otherwise, which are now or which may hereafter be granted to the Citizens or Subjects of the most favored nation: and the subjects of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, shall in like manner be at liberty to enter into, reside in, trade with, and pass through with their merchandize through all Parts of the United States of America, as freely as the citizens and subjects of the most favored nation, and they shall enjoy in the United States of America all the privileges and advantages with respect to commerce, or otherwise, which are now or which may hereafter be granted therein to the Citizens or Subjects of the most favored nation.

Article 3
Citizens of the United States shall be permitted to purchase rent or occupy, or in any other legal way to acquire all kinds of property within the Dominions of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei: and His Highness engages that such Citizens of the United States of America shall, as far as lies in his power, within his dominions enjoy full and complete protection and security for themselves and for any property which they may so acquire in future, or which they may have acquired already, before the date of the present convention.

Article 4
No Article whatever shall be prohibited from being imported into or exported from the territories of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei; but the trade between the United States of America and the dominions of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, shall be perfectly free and shall be subject only to the custom duties which may hereafter be in force in regard to such trade.

Article 5
No duty exceeding one dollar per registered ton shall be levied on American Vessels entering the ports of his Highness the Sultan of Brunei and this fixed duty of one dollar per ton to be levied on all American vessels shall be in lieu of all other charges or duties whatsoever. His Highness moreover engages that American trade and American goods shall be exempt from any internal duties and also from any injurious regulations which may hereafter, from whatever causes, be adopted in the dominions of the Sultan of Borneo.

Article 6
His Highness the Sultan of Brunei agrees that no duty whatever shall be levied on the exportation from His Highness dominions of any article, the growth, produce, or manufacture of those dominions.

Article 7
His Highness the Sultan of Brunei engages to permit the Ships of War of the United States of America freely to enter the Ports, river and creeks, situate within his dominions and to allow such ships to provide themselves at a fair and moderate price, with such supplies, stores and provisions as they may from time to time stand in need of.

Article 8
If any vessel under the American flag should be wrecked on the coast of the dominions of His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, His Highness engages to give all the assistance in his power to recover for, and to deliver over to, the owners thereof, all the property that can be saved from such vessels. His Highness further engages to extend to the officers and crew and to all other persons on board of such wrecked vessels, full protection both as to their persons and as to their property.

Article 9
His Highness the Sultan of Brunei, agrees that in all cases where a citizen of the United States shall be accused of any crime committed in any part of His Highness' dominions the person so accused shall be exclusively tried and adjudged by the American Consul, or other officer duly appointed for that purpose, and in all cases where disputes or differences may arise between American Citizens, or between American Citizens and the subjects of His Highness or between American Citizens and the Citizens or subjects of any other foreign power, in the dominions of the Sultan of Borneo, the American Consul or other duly appointed officer shall have power to hear and decide the same without any interference, molestation or hindrance, on the part of any authority of Borneo, either before during or after the litigation.

This Treaty shall be ratified and the ratifications thereof shall be exchanged at Brunei within two years after this date.

Done at the City of Brunei, on this twenty-third day of June Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and fifty and on the thirteenth day of the month Saaban of the year of the Hegira one thousand two hundred and sixty six.

Signed by:
Joseph Balestier
Seal of the Sultan of Brunei

Appendix C

The Treaty of Kanagawa or the Convention of Kanagawa, between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan (1854)

The full text of the treaty:

The United States of America and the Empire of Japan, desiring to establish firm, lasting, and sincere friendship between the two nations, have resolved to fix, in a manner clear and positive, by means of a treaty or general convention of peace and amity, the rules which shall in future be mutually observed in the intercourse of their respective countries; for which most desirable object the President of the United States has conferred full powers on his Commissioner, Matthew Calbraith Perry, special embassador of the United States to Japan, and the August Sovereign of Japan has given similar full powers to his Commissioners, Hayashi Dai-gaku-no-kami, Ido, prince of Tsushima, Izawa, prince of Mimasaka, and Udono, member of the Board of Revenue. And the said Commissioners, after having exchanged their said full powers, and duly considered the premises, have agreed to the following articles:

Article 1
There shall be a perfect, permanent, and universal peace, and a sincere and cordial amity between the United States of America on the one part, and the Empire of Japan on the other part, and between their people respectively, without exception of persons or places.

Article 2
The port of Simoda, in the principality of Idzu, and the port of Hakodade, in the principality of Matsmai, are granted by the Japanese as ports for the reception of American ships, where they can be supplied with wood, water, provisions, and coal, and other articles their necessities may require, as far as the Japanese have them. The time for opening the first-named port is immediately on signing this treaty; the last-named port is to be opened immediately after the same day in the ensuing Japanese year.

Note. A tariff of prices shall be given by the Japanese officers of the things which they can furnish, payment for which shall be made in gold and silver coin.

Article 3
Whenever ships of the United States are thrown or wrecked on the coast of Japan, the Japanese vessels will assist them, and carry their crews to Simoda, or Hakodade, and hand them over to their countrymen, appointed to receive them; whatever articles the shipwrecked men may have preserved shall likewise be restored, and the expenses incurred in the rescue and support of Americans and Japanese who may thus be thrown upon the shores of either nation are not to be refunded.

Article 4
Those shipwrecked persons and other citizens of the United States shall be free as in other countries, and not subjected to confinement, but shall be amenable to just laws.

Article 5
Shipwrecked men and other citizens of the United States, temporarily living at Simoda and Hakodade, shall not be subject to such restrictions and confinement as the Dutch and Chinese are at Nagasaki, but shall be free at Simoda to go where they please within the limits of seven Japanese miles (or *ri*) from a small island in the harbor of Simoda marked on the accompanying chart hereto appended; and in shall like manner be free to go where they please at Hakodade, within limits to be defined after the visit of the United States squadron to that place.

Article 6
If there be any other sort of goods wanted, or any business which shall require to be arranged, there shall be careful deliberation between the parties in order to settle such matters.

Article 7
It is agreed that ships of the United States resorting to the ports open to them shall be permitted to exchange gold and silver coin and articles of goods for other articles of goods, under such regulations as shall be temporarily established by the Japanese Government for that purpose. It is stipulated, however, that the ships of the United States shall be permitted to carry away whatever articles they are unwilling to exchange.

Article 8
Wood, water, provisions, coal, and goods required, shall only be procured through the agency of Japanese officers appointed for that purpose, and in no other manner.

Article 9
It is agreed that if at any future day the Government of Japan shall grant to any other nation or nations privileges and advantages which are not herein granted to the United States and the citizens thereof, that these same privileges and advantages shall be granted likewise to the United States and to the citizens thereof, without any consultation or delay.

Article 10
Ships of the United States shall be permitted to resort to no other ports in Japan but Simoda and Hakodade, unless in distress or forced by stress of weather.

Article 11
There shall be appointed, by the Government of the United States, Consuls or Agents to reside in Simoda, at any time after the expiration of eighteen months from the date of the signing of this treaty, provided that either of the two Governments deem such arrangement necessary.

Article 12
The present convention having been concluded and duly signed, shall be obligatory and faithfully observed by the United States of America and Japan, and by the citizens and subjects of each respective Power; and it is to be ratified and approved by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate thereof, and by the August Sovereign of Japan, and the ratification shall be exchanged within eighteen months from the date of the signature thereof, or sooner if practicable.

In faith whereof we, the respective Plenipotentiaries of the United States of America and the Empire of Japan aforesaid, have signed and sealed these presents.

Done at Kanagawa, this thirty-first day of March, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ one thousand eight hundred and fifty-four.

M.C. Perry

(Here follow the signatures of the Japanese plenipotentiaries)

Appendix D

Timeline of America's involvement in Southeast Asia, 1800 to 1900

1800: America and France are engaged in the Quasi-War of 1798-1800, as French privateers attack American ships off the coast of Guadeloupe and Hispaniola in the Caribbean.

4 March 1801: Thomas Jefferson becomes the third President of the United States of America.

10 May 1801 to 10 June 1805: The First Barbary War: America fights its first war across the Atlantic, when the Pasha of Tripoli declared war on American commercial vessels along the North African coast. President Jefferson sends a squadron of American frigates – under the command of Commodore Richard Dale – to attack, capture or sink the vessels of Tripoli, along with those of the Barbary pirates of Algiers, Tunis and Morocco. Hostilities finally come to an end with the siege of Tripoli, and Yusuf Karamanli concedes defeat on 10 June 1805.

1804: On 1 January Haiti becomes the first independent republic in the Caribbean and begins to have commercial relations with America.

3 December 1804: Thomas Jefferson is re-elected as President of the United States.

22 June 1807: The British warship HMS *Leopard* boards the American vessel USS *Chesapeake*, on the grounds that the American vessel may have been harbouring British deserters. The Americans regarded this as a direct attack on American neutrality, and subsequent hostility towards Britain contributed to the Embargo Act of 1807.

4 March 1809: James Madison becomes the fourth President of the United States. Madison initially attempted a 'non-intercourse' policy of neutrality towards all the powers in Europe, but relations with Britain continued to deteriorate leading up to the War of 1812.

1812: The War of 1812: In April America imposes a temporary embargo on all maritime trade with Britain. President Madison is keen to take a more

aggressive stand against Britain, partly due to Britain's support for Native American tribes that were resisting American expansionism across the continent. In December 1814 the war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. One of the results of the war was the growing belief that America required a powerful navy, and soon after the government ordered the construction of three new ships-of-the-line and two new frigates. The following year, plans were laid for the production of nine more ships-of-the-line and twelve heavy frigates.

13 August 1814: The First Anglo-Dutch Treaty is signed in London, and Britain returns many Dutch colonial territories back to Holland, including the island of Banka off Sumatra.

1815: The Second Barbary War of 1815-1816. The war was the result of the American government's refusal to pay tribute to the Barbary states that were nominally part of the Ottoman Empire then – Algiers, Tunis, Morocco and Libya. Following raids upon American vessels, and the capture of European seamen and passengers, the US government sent two squadrons of American ships to Algeria commanded by Commodores William Bainbridge and Stephen Decatur. After defeating several Algerian vessels, the Americans were able to compel the Algerians to surrender and concede to the repayment of $10,000 in compensation for lost ships and cargo.

4 March 1817: James Monroe becomes the fifth President of the United States.

20 October 1818: America and Britain sign the Convention respecting Fisheries, Boundary and the Restoration of Slaves (otherwise known as the London Treaty of 1818).

22 February 1819: America and Spain sign the Florida Purchase Treaty (also known as the Adams-Onís Treaty).

1821: The first American ship arrives in Siam, bearing letters of introduction from the President of the United States James Monroe addressed to the King of Siam.

2 December 1823: President James Monroe, in his State of the Union Address, states that that 'the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to

be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers'. This declaration later comes to be known as the Monroe Doctrine.

17 March 1824: The Second Anglo-Dutch Treaty is signed, which gives British merchants access to markets in Dutch-controlled Ternate, Banda and Ambon, while Holland gives up all its bases in the Indian subcontinent.

4 March 1825: John Quincy Adams becomes the sixth President of the United States.

4 March 1829: Andrew Jackson becomes the seventh President of the United States.

7 February 1831: The American merchant vessel the *Friendship* is attacked off the coast of Kuala Batu, Sumatra.

6 February 1832: The First Sumatran Expedition: The American heavy frigate the USS *Potomac* bombards the settlement of Kuala Batu and troops are landed to burn it down. News of the attack reaches America, but a controversy arises thanks to reports that women and children were killed in the attack.

20 March 1833: America establishes formal relations with Siam. America's envoy was Edmund Roberts, the special agent of President Andrew Jackson, who was brought to Siam on the American sloop the USS *Peacock*. Roberts is able to negotiate the Siamese-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce by 20 March 1833, making Siam the first country in Southeast Asia to be formally recognized by the American government.

May 1834: America's government-appointed Resident in Southeast Asia, Joseph Balestier, arrives and takes up residence in Singapore.

1835: The American Navy establishes the East India Squadron, which is given the task of protecting American shipping between China and Southeast Asia.

July 1835: The American preacher Reverend Dan Beach Bradley brings the first printing press in Siamese script to Bangkok. The press was designed and built in Singapore.

4 March 1837: Martin Van Buren becomes the eighth President of the United States.

July 1837: American missionaries led by William Dean set up the first Protestant church in Siam, in the capital of Bangkok.

24-25 December 1838: The Second Sumatran Expedition: The American frigate USS *Columbia* and the sloop-of-war USS *John Adams* attack the settlement of Kuala Batu in Sumatra.

1 January 1839: The Second Sumatran Expedition: The American frigate USS *Columbia* and the sloop-of-war USS *John Adams* attack and destroy the settlement of Meukek in Sumatra.

4 March 1841: William Henry Harrison becomes the ninth President of the United States, but dies in office soon after.

4 April 1841: John Tyler becomes the tenth President of the United States.

1844: America and the Chinese Empire sign the Wanghia Treaty.

July 1844: The *Bangkok Recorder* newspaper is established and published by Dan Bradley in Bangkok.

4 March 1845: James K. Polk becomes the eleventh President of the United States.

1846-1848: The Mexican-American War: After admitting the state of Texas into the United States, Mexico and America both declare war on each other. The outcome of the war was a disaster for Mexico, as it ended up losing not only Texas but also other territories, including Alta California, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. By 1848 America's borders stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, and America now has direct access to the Pacific Ocean.

4 March 1849: Zachary Taylor becomes the twelfth President of the United States. He dies in office in 1850.

April 1850: America negotiates a new commercial treaty with Siam. The American delegation was led by Joseph Balestier, America's Resident, based in Singapore.

23 June 1850: America signs the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation with the kingdom of Brunei. The treaty stipulated that henceforth

there would be free trade and free movement of American citizens in the territory of Brunei (Articles II and III); that Americans would be free to purchase property in the kingdom (Article III); that Brunei would provide assistance and docking facilities to American warships (Article VII); and that any 'citizen of the United States shall be accused of any crime committed in any part of His Highness' dominions the person so accused shall be exclusively tried and adjudged by the American Consul' (Article IX).

9 July 1850: Millard Fillmore becomes the thirteenth President of the United States, the last Whig President in American history. Later members of the Whig party would work with other politicians from the Free Soil party, abolitionists and republican intellectuals to form the Republican Party of the United States on 20 March 1854.

December 1851: The American adventurer Walter M. Gibson arrives at Banka, Dutch East Indies, on his private schooner, the *Flirt*. He would later travel to Palembang and Jambi, and be arrested by the Dutch on the grounds that he was trying to ferment revolt among the Sumatrans against the Dutch colonial government, sparking off the controversy of the *Flirt*.

4 March 1853: Franklin Pierce becomes the fourteenth President of the United States.

March 1854: American Admiral Perry signs the Treaty of Kanagawa with the Empire of Japan.

May 1856: America's first Consul to the kingdom of Siam, Stephen Mattoon, is appointed.

29 May 1856: America and Siam sign a new Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation. This replaces the earlier America-Siam Treaty of 1833.

16-24 November 1856: The American sloops-of-war USS *Levant* and USS *Portsmouth* take part in the Battle of the Pearl River in China.

4 March 1857: James Buchanan becomes the fifteenth President of the United States.

February 1861: King Mongkut of Siam offers to send elephants to America, to be used as transport.

4 March 1861: Abraham Lincoln becomes the sixteenth President of the United States.

12 April 1861: The American Civil War begins. The war would continue for more than four years, ending in May 1865.

1863-1864: The Shimonoseki incident in Japan: The lord of the Choshu clan attacks American ships, which in turn provokes a reaction from the American Navy. The US warship USS *Wyoming* attacks and destroys the small force of Japanese ships.

15 April 1865: Andrew Johnson becomes the seventeenth President of the United States.

19 April 1865: The American natural scientist Albert Bickmore arrives in the Dutch East Indies and lands in Batavia, to begin his expedition to collect a large collection of seashells for an American museum of natural history.

9 May 1865: The American Civil War is declared over.

1868: The American Navy's East India Squadron and Pacific Squadron are merged to create the American Navy's Asiatic Squadron.

4 March 1869: Ulysses S. Grant becomes the eighteenth President of the United States.

1871: The Korean-American conflict: Following an attack on American ships, the US forces attack and destroy the Korean forts around Ganghwa island. Korea refuses to allow American and European ships to sail upriver into Korean territory.

1875: King Kalakaua of Hawaii negotiates the Hawaii-America Reciprocity Treaty.

4 March 1877: Rutherford B. Hayes becomes the nineteenth President of the United States.

1879: Following the end of the American Civil War, the decorated war hero and former President Ulysses S. Grant visits Siam on a tour around the world.

4 March 1881: James A. Garfield becomes the twentieth President of the United States, but is assassinated in September the same year.

July 1881: The American government upgrades the status of Siam as one of its oldest Asian allies, and appoints John A. Halderman as the country's first envoy to the kingdom. The Siamese in turn appoint a minister to the United States, who was based in London.

19 September 1881: Chester A. Arthur becomes the twenty-first President of the United States.

1882: America and Korea finally sign the Shufeldt Treaty of 1882, which establishes terms of friendly trade and cooperation between the two nations.

4 March 1885: Grover Cleveland becomes the twenty-second President of the United States.

June 1887: King Kalakaua faces a revolt organized by Americans in Hawaii, who created the Hawaii Patriotic League. The Americans force King Kalakaua to accept the June 1887 constitution, which disempowered the king.

1887: The United States leases Pearl Harbor from the kingdom of Hawaii.

4 March 1889: Benjamin Harrison becomes the twenty-third President of the United States.

4 March 1893: Grover Cleveland is re-elected and becomes the twenty-fourth President of the United States.

May 1894: The American Standard Oil Company opens its first office in Bangkok and begins its operations in Siam.

4 July 1894: Under pressure from American settlers, Queen Liliuokalani faces a revolt and Hawaii is later declared a republic.

1894-1895: The First Sino-Japanese War.

4 March 1897: William McKinley becomes the twenty-fifth President of the United States, but he is assassinated in September 1901. Following his

death Theodore Roosevelt becomes the twenty-sixth President of the United States, on 14 September 1901.

April 1898: The Spanish-American War begins, as America lends its support to Cuban nationalists who wish to gain independence from Spain. The war lasts only three months, but the outcome of the conflict was a disaster for Spain: Spain not only loses Cuba but also the Philippines. The American Navy courts the support of Filipino nationalists who help them take Manila, but following the defeat of the Spanish forces the Americans occupy Manila for themselves. Spain sells the entirety of the Philippines to the United States, for a sum of twenty million dollars.

7 July 1898: Hawaii is annexed by the United States, and is ruled as a protectorate, as it is declared an 'American territory abroad'.

January 1899: Filipino nationalists in the Philippine Congress pass the Malolos Constitution, which declares the Philippines an independent Southeast Asian republic, but this is not recognized by the Americans. America goes to war against the Filipino nationalist republican government and its armed forces, and the Philippine-American War ensues.

22 February 1900: The American Sanford Ballard Dole is appointed by the US government as the first American Governor of Hawaii.

July 1902: The American government under President Roosevelt passes the Philippine Organic Act, which effectively brings the Philippines under direct American rule.

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A century before the Philippines came under American control, Americans were already travelling to Southeast Asia regularly. *America's Encounters with Southeast Asia, 1800-1900: Before the Pivot* looks at the writings of American diplomats, writers and scientists; and chronicles how 19th century Americans viewed and imagined Southeast Asia through their own cultural-political lenses, and how their writings contributed to the development of American Orientalism. It argues that as Americans came to visit the region they also brought with them a train of cultural assumptions and biases that were unmistakably American as well.

Farish A. Noor is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University of Singapore.

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